

## The Weekly Word

April 24-30, 2023

Hello Bible readers: this week we finish Matthew 12 and move onto chapter 13. I hope you are blessed. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

### Monday, April 24: Matthew 12:38-42 NIV2011

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

<sup>39</sup> He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

<sup>42</sup> The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

### What does the passage say? (What is this passage about? Put it in your own words)

Some Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, "Teacher, we want something to confirm who you are."

He answered, "People who don't trust ask for a sign. You will not get one, except the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was in the belly of a fish for three days so the Son of Man will be in the ground three days. In fact, the people of Nineveh will stand in judgement of this generation, and they will condemn you. They repented because of Jonah's preaching; before you stands someone greater than Jonah. The queen of the South (Sheba) will also judge you and this generation and condemn you; she came from far away to listen to Solomon's wisdom; before you is someone greater than Solomon.

### What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers every where in the world.)

Jesus has given us a sign... His resurrection! Three days in the ground and then raised to life again. Alleluia!

The Pharisees desire for a sign does offer a caution to us when we want God to show us a sign. Sometimes people lay out a proverbial 'fleece' before God to determine the answer to some question or decision. Reading this account gives me great pause about that practice. We are to walk by faith not by sight, or I might add, by signs... (Hebrews 11).

A truly sad aspect of this passage is the sign of Jonah that Jesus did give them was dismissed by most anyway! So sad.

### **What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

The idea of walking by faith is reinforced for me as I sit with this passage open before me. My not-too-distant future has many, yet to be answered, options. Sometimes I wish God would swoop in and make everything clear today. But God has chosen, at least so far, not to do that. So, as a result, I have to walk daily by faith trusting that the Lord has the many aspects of my family's future in His hands and that He will let me know what I need to know when I need to know it.

I am walking by faith...

### **What does this passage mean and say to us?**

As for the people of God, walking by faith is a constant for life. In the church or a community that means trusting the Lord with all our tomorrows. It means making decisions we believe are what God wants us to do, which often requires far more trust and risk than if decisions were made merely by human reasoning. Walking by faith... it is a daily community adventure.

### **Tuesday, April 25: Matthew 12:43-45 NIV2011**

<sup>43</sup> *"When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."*

### **What does the passage say? (What is this passage about? Put it in your own words)**

When a demonic spirit is cast out of a person, it travels to inhospitable places looking for rest which it will not find. Then it will say, 'Let me go back to the person I left'. Arriving, if it finds unoccupied space, it grabs seven other evil spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. The final condition of the person is worse than before the spirit was initially cast out. This is how it will be for this wicked generation.

### **What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers every where in the world.)**

Until the final sentence of this paragraph, Jesus' teaching seems to come out of left field. What does casting out of demons have to do with Pharisees asking for a sign?

Jesus is using a truth that is likely accepted by the masses to underscore the precarious situation of the present generation which is looking for a sign... Their lack of faith is an open door for greater demonic influence, which in turn will lead to the generation's deepening trouble. Sadly, Jesus seems to be teaching that lack of faith only begets even greater degrees of lack of faith and things spiral from bad to worse... This describes Jesus' generation. (This reminds me of Romans 1:18ff where God gives people over to their evil desires. This Romans passage is another difficult word.)

The point of Jesus' teaching is in verse 45. All this being said, we need to think about Jesus' illustration of the cast-out demon returning to the person. One could ask, why then cast out

demons if the person will be worse off when multiple demons return and reinfiltate their life? Certainly the people for whom Jesus cast out demons were healed and better off, so what gives??? Should the church today not deal with casting out of demons? I think not since Jesus specifically gave His disciples authority to do that ministry.

Again, what gives? I think a key for understanding this is in verse 44, when the demon returns to the person it *finds the house unoccupied*... For those of us involved in dealing with the demonic, this passage underscores that we can't stop at the casting out of the demon. We should go a step further, leading the person to inviting the Holy Spirit to come and occupy the parts of their lives that were previously occupied by the demon. This way when the demon returns, the house **will not** be unoccupied. Instead, God the Holy Spirit will be living there, and we know that the demonic cannot remain in the presence of God the Holy Spirit, so the demon will not reoccupy the person but will move on.

Now, I am no expert in the realm of the demonic, but at least to my prayerful study this seems to answer the lingering question of this paragraph...

### **What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

Honestly the Spirit is saying to me, stay close to me. When I, the Spirit, am with you are safe. Keep short accounts when you fall prey to sin so that the Father will forgive and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). Together these two actions protect us from the influence of the demonic and keep us safe with Jesus.

### **What does this passage mean and say to us?**

This passage primarily speaks to the generation of Jesus; thus it is a word to a collective group. So, what do we, God's people, do with this? It seems that we must continually rely on the Lord, continually asking the Spirit to guide us and stay close to us. We must stay faithful to the Lord Jesus continuing to honor the Father in word and deed. We should continue to live by faith (Hebrews 11) trusting that the Lord God will lead and guide us and never question Jesus who is our Lord and Savior.

In other words, we must be the opposite of the Pharisees who wanted a sign because they didn't have faith. And then when Jesus refused to give them the kind of sign they wanted, instead giving them the 'sign of Jonah', they chose not to believe. Thus, they doubled down on their unbelief.

We should double down on our belief, passionately following the Lord as He leads and guides.

### **Wednesday, April 26: Matthew 12:46-50 NIV2011**

<sup>46</sup> While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. <sup>47</sup> Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

<sup>48</sup> He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup> Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. <sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

**What does the passage say? (What is this passage about? Put it in your own words)**

While Jesus was speaking His brothers and mother showed up. Some yelled, "Your mother and brothers are outside wanting to speak with you."

Jesus replied, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then pointing to His disciples Jesus said, "Here are my mother and brothers. Everyone who does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother, sister, and mother."

**What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers every where in the world.)**

This passage feels like Jesus is dissing His family. But I don't think that is the correct sense. Jesus is making the point that once we put on faith and trust in Jesus, we become part of His immediate family... His brother, sister, mother...

How meaningful for Jesus to refer to us as his closest and most intimate family members!

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

I don't hear the Spirit telling me to do anything. Instead, I am overwhelmed by the gift of being Jesus' family... His brother. How joyous and special is that!!!

**What does this passage mean and say to us?**

This question has me thinking about the church, the gathering of believers as family. If as believers we are Jesus' mother, brother, sister then we are all connected with one another, and we are family too. I think we know this conceptually, for me today's reading is emphasizing this. And this affects how we should be treating one another... as the closest of family members.

I am wondering how the world beyond the church would react if this is truly how we treated one another???

**Thursday, April 27: Matthew 13:1-9 NIV2011**

<sup>13:1</sup> That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup> Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear."

**What does the passage say? (What is this passage about? Put it in your own words)**

Note: 13:1-52 is the third teaching panel in Matthew's gospel...

Later that same day Jesus left the house and went down to the lake. A huge crowd gathered to Him, so He got in a boat while all the people stood on the shore. He spoke many parables to them. A farmer sowed seed. Casting his seed, some fell along the path; birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell in rocky ground. Without much soil it sprang up quickly but when the sun

rose the sprouts were scorched and died because the sprouts had no root. Some seed fell where thorns were growing. The thorns choked the sprouts and they died. The rest of the seed fell on good soil and produced a plentiful crop. Listen up and pay attention.

**What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers every where in the world.)**

Because this is a familiar parable, which I have read many times, it is hard not to write about it knowing the interpretation Jesus will give.

Using a hand scattering method, a farmer's seed ends up being scattered on good soil and other not so good soil. The less-than good soil does not produce any crop. Oh, the seed may have begun to sprout but without good soil to root, if the sprouts come up at all they will die out before they yield any crop. Everyone would understand this illustration. And without Jesus' specific explanation the parable could be speaking to any number of situations.

One thing is for certain. Good soil is necessary to produce a harvest. The soil, and not the seed, is the determining factor in the harvest yield.

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

So is the soil of my heart good, so that I can produce a harvest of righteousness for my Lord? This is what the Spirit is asking me...

**What does this passage mean and say to us?**

What kind of soil is our church... are we the kind of soil that is receptive to the leading and teaching of God? Do we embrace God's Word allowing it to take root in our lives and in our community? This is the BIG question of the text for us as a people of God...

**Friday, April 28: Matthew 13:18-23 NIV2011**

<sup>18</sup> "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. <sup>20</sup> The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>22</sup> The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

**What does the passage say? (What is this passage about? Put it in your own words)**

You will notice that I have skipped over verses 10-17, we will read them tomorrow. I skipped over those verses so that I might meditate on Jesus' meaning of the parable of the Sower today, since I read the parable itself yesterday. This way it remains fresh in my mind.

The context of verses 10-17 tell us that the disciples come to Jesus, so Jesus gives His explanation of the parable to His disciples...

Here is what the parable of the Sower means: The seed along the path pictures people who do not understand the Gospel message when they hear it. The evil one comes and snatches it so it doesn't take root in their hearts. The seed sown on rocky soil is the person who hears the message and receives it immediately and joyously but since it doesn't root in their lives it only lasts a brief time. When persecution because of the Word comes, they fall away abandoning the message. The seed sown among thorns refers to people who again hear and receive the Word but when life's worries and the desire for money and a comfortable life rises in them it crowds out the gospel message, causing it to die out in the person. Lastly the seed sown in good soil describes the person who hears the gospel message and takes it deeply into their lives. Their lives produce a plentiful harvest (of righteousness).

**What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers every where in the world.)**

When Jesus explains the parable, He applies it to specific types of people or specific responses different people have to His message.

Hard-soil people don't let Jesus' message into their lives. The devil snatches it before they can have a change of heart.

Rocky-soil people have an initial positive reaction to God's message, but when they begin experiencing pain or problems because of God's message, they bail and drop away.

Thorny-soil people, similarly to rocky-soil people, have an initial positive connection with Jesus' message. But then their hopes and dreams, their desires and wants begin to crowd out Jesus' message to the point where their earthly desires choke out and starve Jesus' message, and they leave Jesus to chase after their hopes and dreams.

Good-soil people have a life-changing encounter with Jesus' message and take it into the depths of their being. Their lives are changed and produce plentiful kingdom harvest.

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

Am I producing the fruit Jesus desires? This should be the result of my new life and how I now live. It should be a natural outgrowth of my deep love for and walk with Jesus. How am I doing???

**What does this passage mean and say to us?**

From another parable, the parable of the wheat and tares, I am realizing that the 'church' will be made up of people of the last three soil types... Not everyone in the church will be producing the bountiful harvest of a good-soil person and some people even after initially receiving Jesus' message will end up disappearing. Some may fade away lured by the opportunities of life, events, activities, etc. Others may pack their bags and leave because of the preaching of God's Word or some other disconnect. God's kingdom will be accomplished through the people who are good-soil types.

Thinking about the hard-soil type, we, God's people, need to still be scattering the seed of God's Word out to them. If they don't respond it is on them...

**Saturday, April 29: Matthew 13:10-17 NIV2011**

<sup>10</sup> *The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"*

<sup>11</sup> *He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. <sup>12</sup> Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. <sup>13</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables:*

*"Though seeing, they do not see;  
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*

<sup>14</sup> *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:*

*" 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.*

<sup>15</sup> *For this people's heart has become calloused;  
they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes.*

*Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.'*<sup>d</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. <sup>17</sup> For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.*

### **What does the passage say? (What is this passage about? Put it in your own words)**

In the narrative of Matthew's text, this passage is in between Jesus' telling of the parable and Jesus' examination of the parable to the disciples...

The disciples asked Jesus why he speaks in parables. Jesus replied, because knowledge of my kingdom has been given to you and not to them. Whoever has been given more will have abundance. But whoever has not been given more, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak in parables:

Though they have eyes they don't see; even though they have ears they don't hear.

The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in them:

You will hear but not understand; see but not perceive. Peoples' hearts have become callused and hard, so they don't see and hear. Otherwise, they might actually see, hear, and understand. Then I would turn and heal them.

Your eyes and ears are blessed because you do see and hear. Mark my words, many prophets and greats of the OT longed to see and hear what you see and hear, but they didn't get that opportunity.

### **What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers every where in the world.)**

God has chosen to open our eyes so that we see and hear and understand the truth! Thanks be to God!!!

Note how this passage underscores God's sovereign role in people understanding the message of Jesus.

**What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?**

For me, this passage is a call to thankfulness... thankfulness that God has allowed me to see, hear and understand the gospel message of Jesus... Thank you, Lord.

**What does this passage mean and say to us?**

Jesus has called us and commissioned us to spread the Good News of Jesus far and wide. Our role is to spread the seed. God determines who sees, hears, and understands. Sandwiched between the parable and its explanation, this passage underscores the truth that we spread the seed liberally; God knows the soil type and whether they will see, hear, and understand.

**Sunday, April 30, 2023 –Sunday Worship**

*If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.*

*If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Linda at [office@LivingHopeCT.org](mailto:office@LivingHopeCT.org).*

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