



STANDING WITH JESUS
FORSAKING ALL ELSE
MATTHEW CHAPTERS 13-16

HOMEGROUP BOOKLET



STANDING WITH JESUS FORSAKING ALL ELSE

MATTHEW CHAPTERS 13 - 16





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Thanks for Being Part of a Homegroup

At Central, we believe that disciples grow in circles, not rows. By that we mean that we grow most as believers when we sit together around God's word, discussing the real issues of life as a follower of Jesus.

Central homegroups are part of the DNA of our church. Sunday services are important, but in homegroups there is greater opportunity for learning together, serving together, caring together, praying together and doing life together. God's people are not saved into isolation, but into a community and a great expression of that community is in homegroups.

Making the Most of Your Homegroup Time

Anything worth doing is worth doing well. That's why we ask that you treat your homegroup as an important part of the rhythm of your weekly life. There are a few things you can do so that you get the most benefit out of the group and so that you are a benefit and a blessing to the group.

- Be There:** Your presence encourages others. It means you are not only committed to the group, but to the other members of the group. Being inconsistent sends a negative message to everyone else.
- Prayer:** Pray for the people in your group, especially your group leader.
- Prepare:** Read any parts of the Bible that your leader suggests, do any homework that comes out of the study. It will not be onerous and you will benefit from it.
- Care:** Be willing to give of yourself to the others in your group. The Bible says, "Love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).



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Why Do the Same Study?

At Central Church all homegroups study the same passage or topic that was preached at the Sunday church service. What are the advantages of doing studies this way?

- Unity: Doing the same study means all across the church we are learning the same things at the same time. It can provide topics of conversation across the whole church.
- Growth: People learn better when they hear things more than once. People learn better when they hear things more than once. Marketing people know this. That is why you see the same commercials on TV over and over again. But it is true. Most people will only remember one or two points from a Sunday sermon (and they are usually the stories that are told as illustrations). People learn best when given the opportunity to talk over the subject matter. By hearing the sermon on Sunday and then being involved in a homegroup discussion during the week, you will find the message of God's Word is sown more deeply into your heart and mind.
- Relevance: By preparing our own studies, we can be specific about issues that impact all of us in our time and place. Most group study materials are from America or were written 10 or 20 years ago and speak to issues of another place or time. You will find that the studies we prepare will be practical and relevant in Ipswich, today.



GIVEN THE KINGDOM'S SECRETS

Matthew 13:1-23

Introducing Matthew

In recent years, we have made our way through Matthew 1 to 12 in three separate teaching series. You will recall that Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience. They knew the Old Testament well and were waiting for the promised Messiah. Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is the Messiah. He also makes it clear that this Messiah is for everyone. From beginning to end, Matthew wants his readers to know that the Kingdom of Heaven Jesus preached is open to all people everywhere. The trajectory of the whole gospel is the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20.

But not all people would receive Jesus. In Matthew 8-12, we saw increasing opposition to Jesus, especially coming from the religious leaders. As we continue our study through chapters 13 to 16, we find the third of five major teaching blocks. Chapter 13 contains 8 parables of the Kingdom. After the teaching block, we come across events that demonstrate more about the identity of Jesus and also, his mission to both Jews and Gentiles. But, as always, he is not warmly welcomed by all. He again finds himself in conflict with the authorities.



For Starters

Have you known people who have demonstrated signs of faith, but then later walked away? Share stories with the group.

Even Jesus had followers who seemed to start strong but then walked away (see John 6:60-66 for an example). Through today's parable, Jesus gives an explanation for this phenomenon. The teaching comes during a time of increasing division amongst the people in their attitudes to Jesus.

From the Word

Read Matthew 13:1-23.

1. Jesus gives both the parable and an explanation. The seed is the word of the kingdom. The soil is the human heart. Who is the sower?
2. According to the parable and the explanation, where does the problem lie when someone does not bear gospel fruit? Where does it not lie?
3. For hearts 2 and 3, Jesus speaks of persecution and worries/riches as factors at play that can affect spiritual growth. Which of these have you seen to most often to cause people to fall away?
4. In verses 10-12 Jesus explains why he uses parables. We usually think that Jesus used parables to make his teaching about the Kingdom of God more accessible to people. But is this the reason?
5. Jesus draws a line between those who hear and those who don't (verse 9). What has to happen before people will hear and perceive (John 6:44, Acts 16:14, Galatians 1:15-16)?
6. Jesus talks about good soils bearing fruit. What kind of fruit do you think Jesus has in mind?



For Discussion

7. It's been said that you can't embrace the Kingdom of Heaven until you've let go of the world. Do you think that's true? See also Matthew 6:19-24 and 1 John 2:15-17. Why do we find this so hard?

8. Two big things that keep people from Christ are trials in the world and riches of the world. Have you been tested in these areas?

9. We often see people who appear to be Christians, who later fall away from their faith. How does this parable explain this?

10. Does the parable say that the soil will always remain the same? Why is this important?

11. How does the Parable of the Sower encourage and comfort us as we do the work of evangelism?

13. Are you bearing the kind of fruit Jesus is looking for? Share around the group where you see gospel fruit in the lives of the others in the group. Encourage one another.

For Prayer

Start the new series by talking about your frontline friends. Make a commitment to pray for the salvation of friends and relatives known by the group. On the next page you will find a place to keep notes about those for whom you are praying as a group. Make this a regular part of your group's prayer routine and also a part of your daily prayer routine as individuals. Pray that God would soften the soil of their hearts as you sow the seed of the gospel.

Give thanks for the fruit evident in the lives of the people in your group.



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MY SERMON NOTES





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2

SHINE LIKE THE SUN

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50

For Starters

What doctrines of Christianity are most harshly condemned by the unbelieving world?

Today we come to the second parable in this teaching discourse. Jesus shifts from why some people do not believe to the consequences of unbelief. To many people this is a hard teaching and one that turns some off belief in the God of the Bible. But in truth, the parable is about God's grace more than anything else.

From the Word

Matthew 13:24-30, 47-50. Then read verses 36-43.

1. There was an old TV quiz show called *Jeopardy* where the host gave the answer and the contestants were expected to respond with the right question. If the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds is the answer, what is the question?



2. What explanation does Jesus give in this parable for why the wicked are not judged immediately?
3. Describe in as much detail as you can the picture of judgement in both parables.
4. What is the relationship between the righteous and the Judge of the Kingdom (verse 43)?

For Discussion

5. The evidence that evil and good co-exist in the world can be found just by picking up the newspaper or watching the news. Wars, terrorism, racial violence, murders etc... make it clear that the weeds are multiplying. Does the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds offer any hope?

6. The language is quite polarising - wicked and righteous. When the Bible declares that there is no one righteous, not one (Romans 3:10-11) who will be saved? What do these verses tell us about who will be found righteous?

Romans 5:18-21

Philippians 3:8-11

7. God's judgement is regarded by many unbelievers as a cruel doctrine and a reason for not believing the gospel. They prefer to speak only of God's love. Is God's judgement incompatible with his love? As a group, formulate a clear and considered response to this question.

8. Do you believe in the reality of God's judgement on the wicked? If this is a clear conviction for us, what action should follow? What stops us and why?



9. Go back to the first question in this study where you came up with a question. Now write down an answer to that question.

10. We noted at the very beginning that God's grace is evident in this parable and should be exalted above the question of judgment. Where do we see God's grace in this teaching?

For Prayer

Spend time dwelling on God's perfect love and perfect justice and praise him for his perfect nature.

Pray again in depth for your frontline friends recorded back in study 1. Update one another on how you have been going in sharing the gospel with them. Then pray for boldness again to speak the word of God.

Give thanks to God for declaring you righteous in Christ and receiving you as his children.



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MY SERMON NOTES



3

A RESTING PLACE

Matthew 13:31-33

For Starters

Where have you seen something small have an enormous impact? (e.g. pay it forward, 8 music notes turn into a symphony, tipping point).

We can be easily discouraged in our Christian walk when it seems like opposition to the church is growing or when our evangelistic efforts seem futile or when we have been waiting a long time to see any gospel fruit. Today we will discuss two little parables that bring much encouragement if this is how you feel. We belong to an Upside-down Kingdom and so it is helpful to view our current experience here on earth with gospel eyes and with a big-picture perspective.



From the Word

Read Matthew 13:31-33

1. What is the kingdom of heaven?
2. How would the crowd have considered a mustard seed and leaven?
3. Each parable makes three points. Jesus often paired parables, each with individual emphases, to make an overall point. What bigger Kingdom realities do these two parables help us see?

	Description	Supporting Scripture	Kingdom Reality
Mustard Seed	smallest of all seeds	Micah 5:2, 1 Cor 1:26-31	
	grows larger than all the other garden plants	Isaiah 9:7 1 Cor 13:12	
	birds of the air come and make nests in its branches	Ezekiel 17:22-24	
Leaven	something good	unlike Matt 16:6	
	is hidden	2 Cor 4:3, Matt 11:25	
	permeates all dough, spreads	Matt 24:14 Hab 2:14	



For Discussion

4. What encouragement can we take from these parables?
5. How should we be sharing the gospel in light of these parables?
6. What is one thing that you have been personally reminded of through these parables? How will it make a difference this week when you meet with your frontline friends?

For Prayer

Consider reading Romans 8:18-25 and Revelation 19:6-9 before you pray

Ask for perseverance and patience as we wait for the consummation of the kingdom of God.

Give thanks that what we see in part will be known in full because what God has begun in Christ he will bring to fulfilment. Give thanks that the power of the gospel is unstoppable.

Pray that we would move towards our frontline friends with renewed urgency and gospel confidence (refer back to the prayer list on page 9).



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MY SERMON NOTES



4

SELL THE LOT!

Matthew 13:44-45, 53-58

For Starters

Have you ever found something that was really so worth having that you were prepared to pay a lot or do much, to have it?

The two parables in this study stress the enormous value of entering the coming kingdom which Jesus is inaugurating. These twin parables have in view the glorious future of those who are citizens of the Kingdom, which Jesus has described in verse 43. We also read how the people of Jesus's hometown of Nazareth could not recognise who Jesus really was, so they failed to understand the incomparable value of being part of Jesus' kingdom.



From the Word

Read Matthew 13:44-45

1. Why do you think it is so important for Jesus to show the worth of the kingdom of heaven?
2. How is the second parable slightly different to the first and what point is this stressing?
3. Jesus says it's worth giving up EVERYTHING to have the Kingdom of Heaven. Go around the room until you run out of steam - everyone say something YOU would be prepared to give up if this is really true. Read Matthew 10:37-39 before you start.
4. The king of the kingdom is Christ Jesus. Consider Paul's expression of the value of Christ in Philippians 3:7-9. Why is Jesus of surpassing worth?

Read Matthew 13:53-58

5. Jesus returns to his hometown, Nazareth. What was the response of the people who heard him teach?
5. What does their question show they just didn't understand?
6. What do they know about Jesus (verses 55-56)?
7. Why did the people take offense at Jesus?
8. Jesus was not accepted by his own townspeople and Matthew notes he was not able to do many miracles there. Why was this the case?



For Discussion

9. What value do you put on being in God's kingdom? (that is, being one of God's people, in God's place, under God's rule and blessing and in the presence of the King!)

10. What things are hard for you to 'sell' (give up) for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven? Why is that?

For Prayer

Give thanks for the Lord Jesus and pray prayers of honour to him. Use the following hymn verse as to get you started.

*I've found the pearl of greatest price,
My heart doth sing for joy;
And sing I must for Christ is mine,
Christ shall my song employ.
(Hymn by John Mason)*

Ask God to help you get your priorities right - to recognise Jesus as your King and to value being in his kingdom more than anything else and to give everything to be in his kingdom.

JC Ryle wrote: *There are three great enemies against which God's children should daily pray - pride, worldliness and unbelief.* What do you pray for daily? Why not pray against these three great enemies of your soul? Remember the prayer of the desperate father: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief." (Mark 9:24) Why not pray this prayer?



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SUFFERING WITH JESUS

Matthew 14:1-12

For Starters

Sometimes the cost of being faithful to God involves suffering for his name's sake. Have you ever suffered for speaking up for Christ? Or can you think of famous people who have suffered much for the sake of the good news about Jesus Christ?

This study will contrast two totally different characters: Herod Antipas (one of the sons of Herod the Great [of Matthew 2 infamy- he killed infants whom he thought may be a threat to his kingship; he also murdered one wife and three sons - he was not a nice guy and neither was his son Antipas!]) and John the Baptist of whom Jesus said there was not anyone greater (Matthew 11: 11). Yet John the Baptist loses his life at the hands of Herod Antipas (The tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea).



From the Word

Read Matthew 14: 1-12

1. How did Herod Antipas (the tetrarch = he ruled over a quarter of the Roman province) hear about Jesus at this time (verse 1)?
2. Who did Herod think Jesus was (verse 2)? Why did he think this (verses 2-4)?
3. What had John the Baptist been preaching (verses 3- 4)?
4. What does verse 5 reveal about Herod?
5. On the day of Herod's birthday, Herodias danced and pleased him, leading him to make a rash promise (verses 6-7). What did Herodias ask for and why (verse 8)?
6. How much sin is a result of weakness rather than maliciousness (verse 9)? Is it wrong to break an evil oath?
7. What did Herod do next (verses 10-11)?
8. What did John's disciples do (verse 12)?
9. Look ahead at verse 13. How did the death of John impact Jesus?

For Discussion

11. Have you ever made a dumb promise which you needed to break? Did you?



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12. In what situations does or could being connected to Jesus cost you? Tick (and explain to the group) the areas where you think being a Christian has had some level of cost.

- financial
- reputational
- relational

- physical
- vocational
- social

In AD 155 or 156 when Polycarp the Bishop of Smyrna (who had been discipled by John the Apostle)as an old man, was brought before the Roman proconsul and ordered to say "Caesar is Lord!". Polycarp refused. He was threatened with being thrown to wild animals, but he was unmoved. The proconsul then threatened to burn Polycarp at the stake. Again Polycarp refused and said: "...How could I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Polycarp was faithful unto death and his reward will be a martyr's crown.

13. In what situations are you tempted to say "Ceasar is Lord"? Indicate below where you face pressure to conform the values around you?

	No Pressure	Some Pressure	High Pressure
Work			
Socially			
Family			

Are you surprised at the sometimes aggressive pursuit of conformity? What do you think is driving this?

For Prayer

Pray for Christians who do risk losing much for following Christ Jesus.

Pray for each other that we might be found faithful to the Lord Jesus.





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6

SATISFIED

Matthew 14:13-21

For Starters

Which of Jesus' miracles recorded in any of the 4 gospels stands out most in your mind? Why do you find it so captivating?

In our passage this week we read of Matthew's account of one of Jesus' most famous miracles - the feeding of the 5000. It is the only miracle from Jesus' earthly ministry that is found in all 4 gospels. Let's spend some time considering why it was so important that each of the gospel writers had to have it in their account of Jesus.

From the Word

Read Matthew 14:13-21



1. Why did Jesus withdraw to a desolate place by himself (v13a)?
2. Jesus' attempt to withdraw for a time of solitude is interrupted by the crowds (v13b).
 - a. How does Jesus react (v14)?
 - b. What does this teach us about Jesus?
3. What does Jesus do about the problem the disciples present him (v15-19)?
4. What is the result (verse 20)?
5. How many people were part of the crowds that were fed (v21)?
6. What is the disciples' role in the miracle (v15-16;19-20)?

For Discussion

7. What should we try to emulate from this passage?
8. Read Exodus 16:1-12 and 2 Kings 4:42-44. What similarities do these accounts have with the miracle recounted in Matthew 14:15-21? What does this teach us about Jesus?
9. What does it teach us about God's provision? Read John 6:26-35.
10. Does this passage teach God will always meet all of our physical needs?



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For Prayer

Thank God for his incredible compassion and love displayed in his son Jesus which is so evident in this passage and ultimately in his selfless death for us. Pray that by his Spirit he would transform our hearts to be full of his compassion for those in need around us, and that he would move us to action.

Pray that we would trust God for his provision - both physical and more importantly spiritual.

Pray we would keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and his promise of a great banquet in heaven with him and all of his people (Matthew 8:11, Revelation 19:9).



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DON'T BE AFRAID

Matthew 14:22-33

For Starters

The greatest lessons are usually learnt the hard way. Tell the group about a lesson you had to learn the hard way.

The sea features a lot in Jesus' early ministry. In ancient cultures, the sea was often considered a dangerous and chaotic place. Many lost their lives on this uncontrollable and unpredictable place. But the testimony of the Scriptures is that God controls the sea. Not only did he part the waters of the Red Sea for Moses and the people to pass through on dry land (Exodus 14 - 15), but as its Creator, the seas are in God's sovereign power (Psalm 89:9). Peter and his colleagues were experienced fishermen, but they could not control the seas and storms.





From the Bible

Read Matthew 14:22-33.

1. The sense of the word 'made' in verse 22 is that Jesus compelled or constrained the disciples to take the boat to the other side. Why would Jesus do this when he must have known what was about to happen on the sea (Isaiah 51:15 tells us that 'God stirs up the sea so that its waves roar')?
2. When Jesus arrives, walking on the water, he declares, "It is I" or literally, "I am." What is significant about this statement? If you need help, look at Exodus 3:14.
3. What is Jesus demonstrating by walking on the water?
4. Peter sometimes gets criticised for lacking faith and sinking. Do you think this is fair?
5. What caused Peter to sink?
6. What was more important in this event ... Peter's faith or Jesus faithfulness?

For Discussion

7. Jesus sent the disciples into the storm. Why? What does this tell you about the difficult circumstances you face in life?
8. Jesus prayed while the disciples were in the storm (v. 23)? Does Jesus seem far off while you are dealing with life's issues? How does this passage help?
9. What usually is our downfall when life overwhelms us? (consider what caused Peter to sink).



10. Why do we let our circumstances push God off the throne?

11. Think about some storms you have faced or are facing in life. Was/is your focus on Jesus throughout? Talk about this with your group.

12. How can Christians support each other through life's storms?

For Prayer

Pray for members of your group who may be facing stormy times in life right now. Pray for faith and eyes only for Jesus until he either calms the storm of life or calms the storm in them.



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FROM THE HEART

Matthew 14:34-15:20

For Starters

Share a time from your childhood or even recently where you weren't allowed in somewhere because you were too dirty. Who stopped you from coming in and why?

Bringing in dirt to a recently cleaned house might upset the person who just spent hours making it spotless, but for the Pharisees, they felt as long they appeared clean outwardly, they wouldn't offend God and were quick to point out when Jesus' disciples didn't do the same. In a similar way, while we might feel justified in our relationship with God because of our good acts, we always need to examine our hearts.



From the Word

Read Matthew 14:34 -15:9

1. What's the difference between the attitudes expressed toward Jesus between the two groups we see in 14:34-36 and 15:1-2?
2. Jesus responds by pointing out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. How does Jesus call them out?
3. Ultimately, valuing man-made traditions over the word of God is symptomatic of something deeper. The quote from Isaiah summarises this in verses 8 and 9. What's the deeper issue? Is Jesus saying it is wrong to have traditions? Why/why not?

Read Matt 15:10-20

4. Jesus draws the crowd in and finally addresses the Pharisees' concern about cleanliness. What is it that actually makes us unclean and why?
5. Why would the Pharisees be offended by this?

For Discussion

21st century Pharisees

5. If we're honest, there's a pharisee in all of us. In what ways do we still act in similar ways to the Pharisees by focussing on outward practices or actions?



6. Why are the outward things themselves not what God is pleased with? Do you still do things that might suggest you don't really believe this fully?

7. Why do you think Jesus' language concerning the Pharisees is so strong?

Clean hearts

8. How would you respond to someone who said that they are basically good because they do not break the commandments (eg. stealing, murder, adultery)?

9. What does our culture teach about the basic goodness or otherwise of humanity?

10. If our heart is the problem, what can we do to make it clean? (Read Ps 51:17, Ezekiel 36:26, Hebrews 10:22, Ephesians 3:17).

11. What difference does this new heart make to our outward lives?

For Prayer

Thank God that he has not left us alone to deal with our own hearts but given us his spirit instead.

Pray that God would reveal the areas in our life where we have been focused on outward practices and neglected our hearts. Ask him for help to grow in Christ-likeness each and every day.



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9

AT THE MASTER'S TABLE

Matthew 15:21-39

For Starters

This little trip is like when you have an away game. Jesus has taken his team of disciples into Gentile territory, which seems strange. Little do they realise however, that they're about to learn some valuable lessons about themselves, Jesus and his mission. And the same challenge is ours.

Recall a time when you were the outsider and tell the rest of the group about it.



From the Word

Read Matthew 15:21-39.

1. Make a dot point outline of what happens in this section:
2. What stands out for you about Jesus' interaction with the woman in verses 22-28?
3. What does the disciples' response tell you about their attitude towards:
 - a. the Canannite woman (and her problems)
 - b. Jesus' mission
 - c. themselves
4. What do you think about Jesus' initial responses?
5. There's a sense of desperation about this woman. What does her doggedness tell you about her attitude towards:
 - a. herself
 - b. Jesus and his mission
6. What is it about this woman that Jesus is so impressed by? Do you think this is an endorsement of being pushy?



What a contrast! Where many of God's people are so entitled they refuse to ask Jesus for help, this woman is so desperate for help, she is grateful to accept even the scraps of God's grace! After healing this poor Gentile woman's demon-possessed daughter, Jesus moves on to another Gentile area, where crowds gather.

7. Compare verses 32-38 to the feeding of the 5000 in chapter 14:13-21. What are the similarities and differences? What do you make of them?
8. The climax of Matthew's gospel is chapter 28:18-20. How might these events in chapter 15 have helped the disciples embrace this mission?

For Discussion

8. "We're all outsiders" Discuss this statement.
9. In what ways can your own attitude slide down the slippery slope and end up being a bit like the disciples' in your attitude towards:
 - Others
 - Jesus' mission
 - Yourself
10. How does this passage challenge your attitude?

For Prayer

It's so easy to go from being outsider, to entitled insider. Pray that as a church and as individuals we'd be:

1. On board with Jesus' attitude and mission towards those who desperately need his grace
2. Humbly filled with gratitude for his grace to us



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