

Foreword

This series is designed to assist you in putting together three or four sermons on parables of Jesus that are unique to Matthew.

Although this is not the specific focus of this study I should say a word or two about Matthew. I believe that Matthew portrays the remembrances and traditions about Jesus which were nourished and passed on by the apostles and leaders reputed to be the pillars of the Church in Judea. In view of the death of James (62 A.D.), and perhaps Peter, as well as the exodus of believers from Jerusalem due to the Roman army incursion, Matthew (I believe), was written in the trans-Jordan shortly after 70. Matthew 28:16-20 is critical for understanding the book. The risen Jesus who announced the inauguration of the kingdom during his ministry appears to his disciples on a mount in Galilee. In traditional Jewish thinking what remains to be done before the end is to inaugurate the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem in preparation for the Messiah who would implement God's new world at his parousia. In Matt. 28:16-20 what the disciples are commissioned to do is to announce the lordship of Jesus to the nations so that they can be held accountable at the final Judgment of the Son of Man. The disciples are to teach the nations all things (Matthew is the handbook on this) and they are to go forth on their mission with the promise that the risen Jesus is with them (Matt. 28:20).

Characteristic of Matthew the three parables we will discuss (*The Wheat and the Tares*; *the Unforgiving Servant*; and *the Sheep and the Goats*) reflect a strong emphasis on the approaching Judgment. For some of us this may arouse some suspicion. I am sure this may even cause some of you to consider looking elsewhere believing this is not the time to speak about anything remotely close to Judgment in your church. I am here to convince you that this would be a mistake.

In looking at these parables I am not surprised by the fact that Judgment is lurking in the background. After all, this theme is around in any serious religious discourse. What is surprising is the emphasis on grace. What is worthy of consideration in these parables is that the idea of receiving grace is linked with the need to respond to its appearance by showing effective action in response. In these parables it takes the form of showing responsible care, mercy, and service to brothers and sisters in Christ.

I am astonished by the number of believers I encounter who are perfectly happy about their perceived state of security in Christ and, at the same time, have little or no interest in the welfare of others in the people of God. They are saved and therefore all is well; this despite the fact that the prophets and leaders in Israel, both in the Old and New Testament, incessantly questioned the assumption that Israel could rely entirely on its idea of election.

So, I ask you to consider taking on this issue. I want you to address those believers who believe they have "mastered" the Christian thing and that there is not much more out there that could get them to see matters differently. To be a Christian is to continually grow; otherwise we die. I probably wouldn't advertise it as "Sermons to a Complacent Church." But you get the idea.

Besides my class lessons, several resources are noted below. First, there is a short bibliography. Then, to accompany my oral presentation (which later will be available on tape and my *Resources Page* at Austin Graduate School of Theology). I am supplying a short discussion on how I would preach an important theme (or themes) from each of these parables. Oh yes, I have preached on one recently and there is a copy of the sermon as well.

So let us dig in and see what happens.

Bibliography

- John H. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1988). Very suggestive.
- Jan Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louvain/Grand Rapids: Peeters, Eerdmans, 1992). A little wordy and sometimes wanders off track; but comprehensive.
- Ben Meyer, "Many (=all) are called, but Few (not all) are chosen." In *Christus Faber* (Allison Park, Penn.; Pickwick Publications, 1992) 81-90. A good exegesis.
- David J. Neville, "Toward a Teleology of Peace: Contesting Matthew's Violent Eschatology," *JSNT* 30/2 (2007) 131-161. Thought provoking.
- David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989). Very easy to read. But helpful.

Allan J. McNicol
Sermon Seminar 2012