

The Gospel of Matthew

6.

Doubt, Indifference, and Dissent (11:2—12:45). The
Mysteries of the Kingdom Revealed (12:46—13:58)

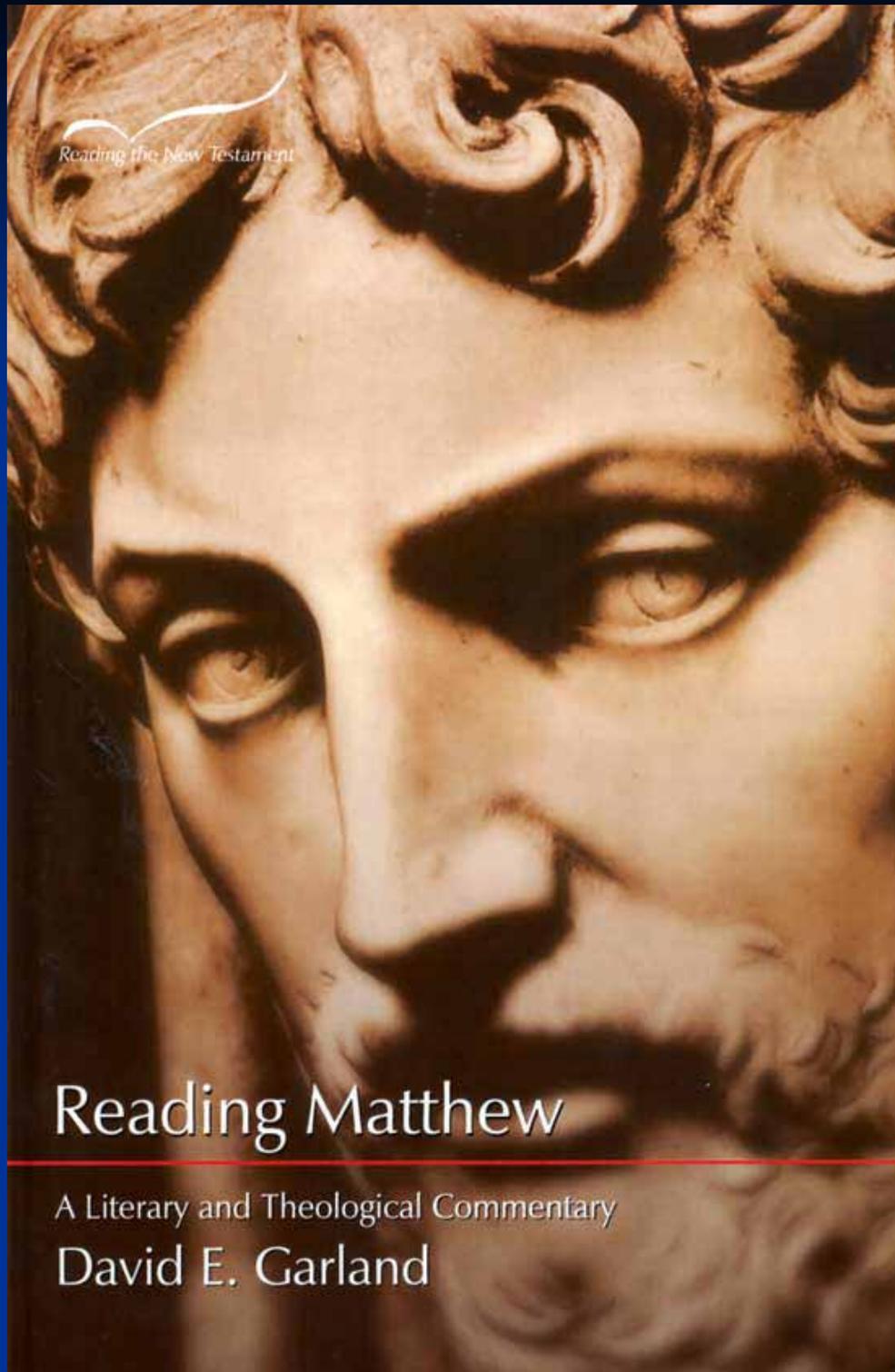
Sunday, February 5, 2006

10 to 11 am in the Parlor.

Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

Almighty God, you sent your Son Jesus Christ to reconcile the world to yourself: We praise and bless you for those whom you have sent in the power of the Spirit to preach the Gospel to all nations. We thank you that in all parts of the earth a community of love has been gathered together by their prayers and labors, and that in every place your servants call upon your Name; for the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours for ever.



- **Reading Matthew. A Literary and Theological Commentary**, David E. Garland, Smyth & Helwys, 2001, ISBN 1-57312-274
- **David Garland** is Professor of Christian Scriptures and Associate Dean for Academic Services at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University

- **Introducing Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 1:1—4:16)**
 - The Birth of the Messiah: The Fulfillment of God's Promises (1:1-25)
 - From Judea of David to the Galilee of the Gentiles (2:1-23)
 - Getting Ready: God's Son in the Wilderness (3:1—4:11)
 - Dispelling the Darkness in Galilee (4:12-16)
- **Jesus' Ministry to Israel - Part 1. Teaching, Healing, and Calling the Lost Sheep (Matthew 4:17—10:42)**
 - Jesus' Debut: Authority and Compassion. Dawn in Galilee (4:17-25)
 - The Sermon on the Mount: Magisterial Teaching, A Charter for Discipleship (5:1—8:1)
 - Restoring Life to Others: Jesus the Healer (8:2—9:35)
 - Great Harvest and Great Dangers: The Mission Discourse (9:36—10:42)
- **Jesus' Ministry to Israel - Part 2. Rejection and Confession (Matthew 11:2—16:20)**
 - **Doubt, Indifference, and Dissent (11:2—12:45)**
 - **The Parable Discourse: the Mysteries of the Kingdom Revealed (12:46—13:54)**
 - **The Mission Resumes (13:54—16:12)**
 - Rejection in Nazareth (13:54-58)
 - The Death of John (14:1-12)
 - Two Great Signs (14:13-36)
 - A Dispute with Israel; An Opening to the Gentiles (15:1-28)
 - Healing and Feeding the Multitudes; Demand for a Sign (15:29—16:12)
- **Jesus' Passion and Resurrection (Matthew 16:21-28:20)**
 - **The Journey to Jerusalem (16:13—20:34)**
 - Confession at Caesarea Philippi (16:13-28)
 - Transfiguration (17:1-21)
 - Living Together as the Family of God: Life Within the Community of the Kingdom (17:22—18:35)
 - Teachings on the Journey (19:1—20:16)
 - The Conclusion of the Journey (20:17-34)
 - **In the Holy City: Conflict, Death, and Resurrection (21:1—28:15)**
 - The Messiah in the Temple (21:1-17)
 - The Teacher and His Opponents (21:18—22:46)
 - False Teachers Lead Others to Ruin: Condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees (23:1-39)
 - The Coming of the Son of Man and the Judgment of the World (24:1—25:46)
 - The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. Finale (26:1—28:15)

Doubt, Indifference, and Dissent

Matthew 11:2—12:45

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Introduction

- Questions about Jesus' identity, and opposition to him begin to arise.
- Who exactly is Jesus?
 - “He who is to come”? (11:3)
 - The “son of David”? (12:23, 15:22)
 - The “son of God”? (14:33)
- Where did he get his wisdom and mighty works? (13:54)
- Questions will culminate with Jesus' question to his disciples: “Who do you say I am? (16:15) which Peter will answer most memorably

Matthew 11:2—12:45

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Chapter 11 Overview

- Overview of Chapter 11:
 - 1. **Messengers from John the Baptist** (11:2-19).
Has three subsections that begin with a question:
 - 1.1. (11:2-6). **Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?**
 - 1.2. (11:7-15). **What did you go out into the wilderness to look at?**
 - 1.3. (11:16-19). **But to what will I compare this generation?**

Matthew 11:2-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Chapter 11 Overview

- Overview of Chapter 11:
 - 2. **Woe to Unrepentant Cities** (11:20-24)
 - Jesus condemns three cities in Galilee that fail to repent.
 - 3. **Jesus Thanks his Father** (11:25-30). Contains:
 - An explanation for indifference
 - Declaration about Jesus and his mission
 - Invitation to discipleship

Matthew 11:2-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- John the Baptist has been in prison throughout Jesus' ministry.
- John had predicted: **Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."** (Matthew 3:10-12 NRSV)

Matthew 11:2-6

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- John, hearing about “what the Messiah was doing,” apparently starts to have second thoughts, and sends messengers to ask **“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”** (Matthew 11:3 NRSV)
- Jesus replies: **Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.** (11:4-5 NRSV)

Matthew 11:2-6

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- These deeds match various passages in Isaiah:
 - Isa 29:18: **On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.** (NRSV)
 - Isa 35:5-6: **Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.** (NRSV)
 - Isa 42:18: **Listen, you that are deaf; and you that are blind, look up and see!** (NRSV)
 - Isa. 26:19: **Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise.** (NRSV)
 - Isa. 61:1: **he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed** (NRSV)

Matthew 11:2-6

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- The last item on Jesus' list **“the poor have good news brought to them.”** (11:5) seems anti-climatic after **“the dead are raised”** (11:5).
 - However, recall from our study of the beatitudes: the **“poor”** are those completely dependent upon God for help – it thus sums up the entire list.
- A fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q521) show its authors also thought that such deeds would mark the Messiah or the messianic era.

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- A concluding beatitude (11:6 NRSV): And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me:
 - Suggests Jesus understands his works are ambiguous and cannot fully dispel doubts and uncertainty.
 - Suggests Jesus understands there is something scandalous about him that jolts conventional ideas about the Messiah.
 - Reactions to him will include both faith and offense.

Matthew 11:2-6

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- Jesus now clarifies just who is John the Baptist by asking “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? (11:7 NRSV)
 - Reed = an emblem for Herod Antipas that appeared on his coins. This and 11:8 (“**What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes?**”) are likely barbs at Herod.

Matthew 11:7-15

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- Jesus confirms, that yes, they went into the desert (a traditional place of God's revelation) to see a prophet.
- And not just any prophet, but the greatest of the prophets (11:9), the messenger sent ahead of Jesus to prepare the way.

Matthew 11:7-15

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- But then Jesus goes on to say: “**yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**” (11:11 NRSV)
 - Even being the greatest of prophets does not mean one fully understands what God is doing, or spare one from a crises of faith.
 - Also implies status in the Kingdom of God is through grace.

Matthew 11:7-15

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- A new era.
 - Jesus' phrases in 11:12 ("From the days of John the Baptist until now") and 11:13 ("until John came") imply that with John a new era in salvation history has arrived.
- Jesus goes on to make the fantastic claim that **"if you are willing to accept it, he [John] is Elijah who is to come"** (11:14 NRSV)
- The readers of Matthew must ask themselves: if John is the greatest prophet, the Elijah who is to come, sent to prepare the way for Jesus – then who is Jesus?

Matthew 11:7-15

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Messengers from John

- Jesus then castigates “this generation,” using the analogy of children playing:
 - The wedding game (piping and dancing)
 - The funeral game (wailing and mourning)
- This generation is like aloof children on sideline who sulk and decline to play.

Matthew 11:16-19

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Woe to Unrepentant Cities

- Jesus suddenly pronounces woe to the Galilean cities of:
 - Capernaum (the home base of his ministry)
 - Chorazin
 - Bethsaida
- This is a surprise
 - Up to now, there has been no mention of these town reacting unfavorably to Jesus

Matthew 11:20-24

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Woe to Unrepentant Cities

- Their fate seems horrible: worse than Sodom (whose sins were adultery, lies, pride, neglect of the poor)
- Impresses on the reader of Matthew that indifference or rejection of Jesus is the deadliest of sins

Matthew 11:20-24

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Jesus Thanks His Father

- The section 11:25-30 has three pieces:
 - Thanksgiving (11:25-26)
 - Pronouncement (11:27)
 - Invitation (11:28-30)

Matthew 11:25-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Jesus Thanks His Father

- The Thanksgiving (11:25-26) provides an explanation for why people reject Jesus
 - Something about the mentality of those who think of themselves as “wise and understanding” make them unreceptive to God’s revelation
 - In contrast, the mentality of “babes,” the childlike are those who are open to the revelation.

Matthew 11:25-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Jesus Thanks His Father

- In the Pronouncement (11:27) Jesus tells us:
 - Only the God the Father fully knows the Son.
 - God the Father is known through the Son.
 - This reciprocal knowledge testifies to a unique and mystical relationship between Father and Son.

Matthew 11:25-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Invitation

- In the Invitation (11:28) Jesus invites people to accept his yoke.
- For Jews, the image of the yoke represented “burden, labor and obligation, and yet it symbolizes freedom and life” (C. Deutsch)
- One reads of:
 - “yoke of serving God” (Jer 2:20, 5:5)
 - “yoke of Wisdom” (Sir 6:30, 51:26)
 - “yoke of the law” (Acts 15:10, Mishna)
 - “yoke of the commandments” (Mishna)
 - “yoke of the kingdom of heaven” (Mishna)

Matthew 11:25-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Invitation

- There is never talk of the “yoke of Moses” – only God and God’s word is worthy of one’s submission and homage
- Jesus offer of “my yoke” would be blasphemy unless one recognizes the union between Father and Son.
- The offer to take “my yoke” also implies all of us are under some yoke or domination, and our choice is what yoke we choose.

Matthew 11:25-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Invitation

- Jesus' yoke is "easy" not because the way is easy – it is "hard and narrow" (7:13-14), a "cross" to be borne (10:38), something that splits families (10:34-37) – but because:
 - Jesus is meek and gentle, and treats us as "yokefellow"
 - The yoke "fits." His demands grow out of our needs.

Matthew 11:25-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Chapter 12 Overview

- Overview of Chapter 12:
 - 1. 12:1-21 contains two Sabbath Controversies
 - Controversy arising in a field (12:1-8)
 - Controversy arising in a synagogue (12:9-14)
 - 2. 12:22-45 describes the churlish reaction of the Pharisees to Jesus
 - Begins with Jesus' healing (12:22)
 - Ends with the **Parable of the Return of the Unclean Spirit**

Matthew 12:1-45

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Sabbath Controversies

- We are commanded to keep the Sabbath holy by refraining from work in Exodus 20:8-11.
- Jews viewed the Sabbath observance not as something irksome, but as a joyful entry into sacred time.
- Fasting was banned: eating and drinking were encouraged.
- The Sabbath was a symbol of the special relationship between the God and Jews. God's chosen people rest on the same day as did the Creator.
- Breach of the Sabbath would elicit the same feelings among Jews of Jesus day as desecration of the flag does among most Americans.

Matthew 12:1-21

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Sabbath Controversies

- Jesus and his disciples are accused of violating the Sabbath by:
 - Plucking the heads of grain to eat when they were hungry on the Sabbath (12:1)
 - Healing the man with the withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath (12:13)

Matthew 12:1-21

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Sabbath Controversies

- Jesus justification for “violating” the Sabbath are summarized in his statement **“For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”** (Matthew 12:8 NRSV)
- We do not find in Matthew the full statement in Mark 2:27 **“The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath, so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.”** (NRSV)

Matthew 12:1-21

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Sabbath Controversies

- Matthew's main interest here is in **Christology**, in making the reader understand that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah
 - If David can take liberty with the law (12:4), then surely so can Jesus, who is greater.
 - Priest must violate the letter of the law to do their temple duties, so surely can Jesus, who is greater than the temple.

Matthew 12:1-21

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Sabbath Controversies

- Jesus also says the Pharisees do not understand the saying in Hosea 6:6 “**I desire mercy and not sacrifice**” (12:7): God’s demand for mercy must be taken into account *first* in any interpretation of the law.

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Sabbath Controversies

- Pharisees in response begin to conspire how to destroy Jesus.
- Jesus in response does not fight or strike out against them, but simply departs, consistent with the humility and lowliness of the servant of God in the extended quote from Isaiah 42:1-4 in Matthew 12:18-21, a servant who has not come to seize power or thrash his enemies.

Matthew 12:1-21

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Allegations and Demands

- Matthew 12:22-45:
 - Describes allegations and demands by the Pharisees.
 - Includes comments by Jesus that allow the reader to see the blindness of his opponents.
- In 12:22-30 Jesus heals a blind and mute man. The Pharisees do not dispute the cure, but claim he works by the power of the Beelzebul, the ruler of demons.

Matthew 12:22-45

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Allegations and Demands

- In 12:22-30 Jesus heals a blind and mute man. The Pharisees do not dispute the cure, but claim he works by the power of the Beelzebul, the ruler of demons.
- Jesus ridicules their claim, noting **“If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand.”** (12:26 NRSV)

Matthew 12:22-30

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Allegations and Demands

- In Matthew 12:31-37, the Pharisees are condemned as blasphemers, bad trees, a brood of vipers.
- In 12:31-32, Jesus says: **“whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come”**
(NRSV)
 - Garland suggest this is biblical hyperbole to stress the importance of responding to the Spirit. If you don't respond to the Spirit, you cut yourself off from all that can lead one to repentance.

Matthew 12:31-37

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Allegations and Demands

- In Matthew 12:38-45, the Pharisees demand an irrefutable sign from Jesus.
- The demand for a sign echoes the demand of Satan for a sign from Jesus in the wilderness (4:3, 5-6) and suggests the alliance of the Pharisees with Satan.
- The only unambiguous “sign” will be the “sign of Jonah:”
 - Matthew 12:40 (NRSV): **“For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.”**

Matthew 12:38-45

Doubt, Indifference, Dissent

Allegations and Demands

- Section ends with the **Parable of the Return of the Unclean Spirit**.
 - The spiritual world also abhors a vacuum.
 - After liberation from demonic powers, if you do not repent, if you do not fill yourself then with the Spirit of God, you are vulnerable to another invasion by Satan.

Matthew 12:38-45

The Mysteries of the Kingdom Revealed

Matthew 12:46—13:58

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Introduction

- Jesus' ministry of salvation is being met with confusion, indifference, and frank hostility.
- Why does Israel not embrace its Messiah?
- In this section, we learn of three reasons beyond the slanders by the Pharisees:
 - The hardness of the human heart
 - The wiles of Satan
 - The deceptively humble presence of the **Kingdom of God** before its final coming at the end of time.

Matthew 12:46—13:58

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Weeds Among Wheat

- In Jewish literature, sowing is a metaphor for the work of God
- Not all seed that is sown prospers, and the reason is a problem in the spiritual state of the human heart:
 - Lack of spiritual insight compounded by Satan snatching and eating up the seed (13:4, 13:19)
 - A withering under persecution (13:6, 13:21)
 - A withering under daily anxieties and through the lure of material things and prosperity (13:7, 13:22)

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Weeds Among Wheat

- Another reason for the people not accepting Jesus is that the evil one, Satan, not only
 - Snatches away the seed,
 - But has sown the fields with weeds.
- The weeds = tares
 - a species of rye-grass. The seeds are a strong soporific poison
 - bears a very close resemblance to wheat till the ear appears
 - grows plentifully in Syria and Palestine

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Weeds Among Wheat

- Parable explains:
 - Why many do not respond to Jesus.
 - Why there is continued opposition in this world to the Kingdom of God.
- It is not the servant's responsibility to purge the world of the those who appear evil, for in the process they may destroy some who are not evil.
- In the end, justice will be done, for God will tell the reapers **“Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”** (13:30 NRSV)

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Dragnet

- In the **Parable of the Dragnet** (13:47-50), we get a similar image of justice being done at the end of time: **“the angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire”** (13:49-50 NRSV)

Matthew 13:47-50

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Mustard Seed

- The **Parable of the Mustard Seeds** reminds us that a very small beginning can result in a very surprising end result.
 - One cannot judge the future manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth by the humble ministry of Jesus.
- There is a further “rub” here. The image is a very odd one, and is exaggerated.

Matthew 13:31-32

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Mustard Seed

- The mustard seeds grows like a weed into a 8 to 10 foot tall shrub, and can quickly get out of control.
 - It hardly compares to the majestic, towering cedars of Lebanon.
- Suggests that the Kingdom of God is “not a towering empire, but an unpretentious venture of faith” (R. W. Funk), coming as a lowly mustard bush rather than as a “mighty cedar astride the lofty mountain height.”

Matthew 13:31-32

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Leaven

- Leaven was a symbol of corruption in Hebrew Scripture.
- A piece of the previous week's dough was kept until it began to ferment. It was then mixed into a large mass of new dough as a homemade rising agent.
 - Was hazardous. It sometimes infected and poisoned the dough.
 - It thus became a symbol for the infectious power of evil

Matthew 13:33

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parable of the Leaven

- The parable was thus another odd image, equivalent to comparing the Kingdom of God to something like a virus, or rust
 - it inverts the common images of the sacred and profane

Matthew 13:33

Mysteries of the Kingdom

Hidden Treasure and Pearl

- **The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Merchant in Search of Fine Pearls** tells us how to respond to the presence of the Kingdom
- We must be decisive, resourceful and willing to risk everything

Matthew 13:44-46

Next Session:
**Rejection and
Confession:
The Mission Resumes
(13:54—16:12)**

Rejection in Nazareth (13:54-58)

The Death of John (14:1-12)

Two Great Signs (14:13-36)

A Dispute with Israel; An Opening to the Gentiles (15:1-28)

Healing and Feeding the Multitudes; Demand for a Sign
(15:29—16:12)