

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

Yves I-Bing Cheng, M.D., M.A.

Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

www.meetingwithchrist.com

SCRIBES TRAINED FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Matthew 13:51-52

In Matthew 13:51-52, we find these sentences. These are the words of our Lord Jesus addressed to His disciples.

Matthew 13:51. "Have you understood all this?" They said to him, "Yes."

52 And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

What can we learn from a passage like this? These two verses are connected by the word 'therefore'. What is the link between v. 51 and v. 52? This passage is sometimes called the Parable of the Householder. What is the point that this parable is making? What is this thing that is both old and new?

As we consider these questions and try to answer them, I'm hoping that you are going to see some very important principles emerging from this passage.

Making disciples

The context of our passage can be seen immediately as we read the following verse, v. 53. *Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there.* So the context is about Jesus teaching in parables concerning the kingdom of heaven. Six of the seven parables found in this 13th chapter of Matthew begin with this expression, 'The kingdom of heaven is like' this.

In v. 51, after finishing all His teaching on the parables, the Lord Jesus asks this question to His disciples: *Have you understood all this?* 'Do you understand all the things that I taught in the seven parables?' They said, *Yes, Lord.* Well, as far as they knew, they understood it. Of course, anyone who imagines that he has understood all there is to understand about the parables in all its riches is likely to discover that it is not so. But the disciples, as far as they were able to understand it, felt that, yes, they understood the main points.

Then in v. 52, the Lord Jesus said, *Therefore... Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder.* Here the reasoning is to be viewed in this way. The Lord Jesus is saying, 'If you understand My teaching, if you understand My word, therefore you will become like a scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven.' So the comparison is made with a scribe who has been trained. And this is the central point of this verse. In fact, if we want to use familiar words, I would say that this passage is about making disciples.

Turn with me to the end of the gospel of Matthew, in Matthew 28:18-19.

Matthew 28:18. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."

Here, the Great Commission is expressed by the Lord Jesus in this way: *All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.* On the basis of the authority that God the Father has given to Jesus, *Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations...* The Greek word translated here by ‘*make disciples*’ is exactly the same word as ‘*trained*’ that we have in Matthew 13, *trained for the kingdom of God.* So the Lord Jesus sends forth His disciples to make disciples. It is a command that is addressed to all believers. It is also the duty of all believers to be trained for the kingdom of God.

Every Christian is to become like a scribe, trained for the kingdom of God. You see, only two categories of people in the OT made disciples, the scribes and the prophets. And the Lord Jesus expects every Christian to become, in due time, a scribe, a Christian scribe, who will be able to make disciples. The Lord Jesus doesn't send us forth to make converts only, to add numbers to the congregation of the church. He wants us to make disciples, who will be loyal to Him through thick and through thin.

In order to clarify this expectation of the Lord Jesus, we need to consider the function of the scribe. What exactly did a scribe do? Well, basically, a scribe did three things. He had a three-fold task. And I want to explain to you what these three functions are so that we get a clear picture of what we ought to be as a disciple of Christ.

A student of the law

First of all, a scribe is a student of the law of God. A scribe was a rabbi. He studied the law. He was an expert in the law of God.

But it was not just any kind of studying. He studied very carefully. In John 5:39, the Lord Jesus said, *You **search** the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life...* The word ‘search’ there is very characteristic of how the scribe studied the law. He didn't just read the Bible, but he searched the Scriptures. He went deep into it. He looked into the depth of the Word of God.

This then is the first task of the scribe. He studied very carefully. He searched the Scriptures. And why did he search the Scriptures? He searched them to find eternal life. Remember John 5:39. *You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have **eternal life**...* He searched the Scriptures because he knew that only in the Bible do you find the message of the word of life. He sought the words of eternal life. For sure, no subject is more important for study in this world than the Word of God.

Remember your student days. No matter what you studied, your ultimate goal was to get physical life. You want to earn your living. Of course, you might study because you are somewhat interested in the subject. But ultimately, you study because you want to make a living. You are learning skills required for a particular job. So you study in order to secure a living for yourself. When it comes to the spiritual realm, we realize that there is no subject in the world more important than the study of the Word of God because we are dealing with eternal life. Everything else passes away. Any subject that you study today will be outdated in a few years time. It will all be passé.

I interrupted my medical practice for three years in order to study the Bible on a full time basis in a Bible school. When I came back from these studies, God led me to practice medicine again. But I

had to be trained again. I had to learn not only the skills that I had forgotten, but also new things that didn't exist before I left. And we are talking about a period of only three years. But the Word of God never passes away. Isaiah 40:8 says, *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.* It stands forever because it deals with eternal life. Really, there is no subject in the world more important to study than the Word of God. Every scribe understood that very well.

A teacher of the law

Now, having studied the law, his second task was to teach it. The scribe didn't study the law only to get a personal satisfaction of knowing the path to eternal life, but rather that he may then help others unto the path of eternal life. He studied the law in order to teach others. In Luke 5:17, we find that the scribe is called a 'teacher of law'. In Greek, it is one word, a 'law teacher'. So when we train in the kingdom of God, when we study the Word of God, we have to keep in mind that it is for the purpose of helping others to find the path of life, to show them the way of eternal life.

But teaching the law of God is very different from any other kind of teaching because the scribe was not meant to teach only by his knowledge of the Bible. He was not meant to teach only by word of mouth. He was to teach by his example, by his life. The scribe of the kingdom must not only know the Bible well. He must be an example by his life.

I think we are more used to define a good teacher in terms of his ability to make us understand a particular point. His private life is none of your business. When it comes to the Bible, it is not so. In the Bible, the private life of the teacher, especially the moral life of the teacher, is your business because the scribe taught not just by his words, but also by the kind of life he lived. That was very clear in Paul's mind. The apostle Paul was a scribe too. Even prior to his conversion, he had his own disciples. He is also the one who said in 1Corinthians 11:1, *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.* By this, he meant that his teaching is expressed in his life. It is of the kind that you can imitate for the glory of God. You don't just learn his teaching, but you follow his example. You follow the way he lives.

Being a judge

Let's come to the third function concerning the scribe. The scribe not only studied the law, he not only taught the law, but it was his task also to apply the law in various situations. And he applied the law by acting as a judge. Judges in Israel were most frequently chosen among the scribes obviously because of their knowledge of the law of God. They were therefore the best qualified to act as judges in the country.

When it comes to the Christian scribes, we find that he is expected to do the same thing. The servant of God in the church, the scribe of God trained for the kingdom is expected to act as a judge in the church. We see this in 1Corinthians 5:12 and 6:5. There, you remember, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for taking a case to a secular court. And he says to them, *Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?* 'There is nobody among you who is qualified to act as a judge between brothers and sisters? Is there no scribe among you who knows the Word of God well enough to act as a judge that you have to take this case before a secular court and so disgrace the name of Christ in front of unbelievers?' You see, Paul expected the Christians themselves to have scribes who would act as judges inside the church.

The word 'to judge', here, does not mean 'to criticize', of course. It means to pass an act of judgment in accordance with the Word of God in deciding a case. It has to do with the judging of a case.

Our treasure

The Lord Jesus likens this scribe trained for the kingdom to a householder, a person who looks after a household, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. This is a rather curious comparison, isn't?

First of all, what is the treasure that this householder has? The apostle Paul talks about this treasure in 2Corinthians 4:7. He says, *But we have this **treasure** in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.* A few verses earlier, in v. 3 and v. 4, he calls this treasure by another word. He calls it 'the gospel', *the gospel of the glory of Christ.* So the treasure is the gospel. And that gospel is to be transmitted, it is to be revealed by the light of Christ. That is why in v. 4, it is called *the **light** of the gospel of the glory of Christ.*

But that is not the whole connection. This treasure, this gospel, it is to be revealed by the light of Christ through us, the earthen vessels. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, the earthen vessels being our frail bodies. This gospel has transforming power. And we have power, only in the sense that we, as the recipient of the treasure, can transmit this transforming power of the gospel as we preach Christ.

Something old and new

So what is this treasure? This treasure is the gospel. Now let's go back to Matthew 13. Out of his treasure, the householder is able to bring forth things which are old and new. 'Old and new', what does that mean? What can be at the same time both old and new? I can think of only one thing: the truth.

The remarkable thing about truth is that it has the quality of being both old and new at the same time. Let's clarify that. On the one hand, truth is not something that was invented yesterday. It is old because truth has always existed. But if it were only old and it has already passed away, then it cannot be truth. On the other hand, it is always new because the truth never ceases to be truth, no matter what time in history you live. It doesn't have to be updated. But if it were only new, it wouldn't be truth because truth cannot be something that has just been discovered. It has always been the truth. Truth is eternal. It goes on forever. The truth of God does not change. It abides forever. So it is old and yet, it is always new. You get it?

This principle applies remarkably well to the spiritual things. Take for example 1John 2:7. This principle of old and new is applied there to the command to love.

In 1John 2:7, we read this. *Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an **old** commandment which you have had from the beginning. The **old** commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.*

Then in the following verse, in v. 8, we have this. *Again, a **new** commandment I write to you (and notice that John is talking here about the same commandment of v. 7), which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.*

You see how John speaks of that commandment to love. It is an old commandment (v. 7). But it is also a new commandment (v. 8). How can it be? Because it is the truth! It is 'true in Him and in you.' And as I explained, truth is always both old and new. In fact, only truth can be at the same time both old and new.

Summary

Now we are ready to put all the pieces together. The Lord Jesus is saying to us that if we understand His teaching, we will be concerned to be like a scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven. The Lord Jesus was training His disciples to be scribes for the kingdom. And He expects every person to become a disciple to such an extent that he will be able to make disciples.

Such a person longs to study the Word of God, to search through the Scriptures what God wants to reveal to man. He knows that it is not just a matter of stuffing knowledge in his head. His life has to be in line with the teaching of the Bible. And as he matures, his spiritual faculties are being trained by practice and experience to discern between good and evil. Notice this word 'trained' in Hebrews 5:14: *But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses **trained** to discern good and evil.* He becomes able to act as a judge, i.e. passing an act of judgment in accordance with the Word of God about a case.

A scribe is also a man who is equipped with power, the power from above. Because no matter how hard we train to be like a scribe, in of ourselves, we have no power. We are only earthen vessels. The power lies in the treasure, in the gospel, in the eternal truth of God. That is what transforms people. That is what makes a lost person, sold to the flesh, to become a disciples of Christ, led by the Spirit.

Equipping others

In closing, I would like to read to you 2Timothy 2:2. *And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

That is what Paul says to Timothy, his own disciple, who was now himself a scribe of the kingdom of heaven, making disciples. 'I'm teaching you because I have been taught. And as you are being taught, I expect you to be able to teach others in due time.' By teaching, we don't necessarily mean being a Sunday School teacher. To use the words of Paul that we saw in 2Corinthians 4:4, it is to teach by shining *with the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.*

So that's the pattern, the one who is being trained then trains others. And it goes on, building solidly the kingdom of God.

Are you such a scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven?