

Lesson 1 – 31 October, 2010

The Kingdom Parables

Lesson Scope: [Matthew 13](#)

Lesson Focus

Chapter 13 marks a new period of Jesus' ministry on earth. Here He begins to incorporate parables with His teaching in order to reach the lost sheep of Israel. Because the Jewish leaders had now publicly rejected Jesus as the Messiah, many of the people were confused. He used the parabolic method to open their eyes and invite them to a fuller understanding of God.

This chapter contains eight parables, all taught the same day. They deal with what we know as the Church Age, the time between Jesus' sowing the seed during His earthly ministry and the time of final reaping. These parables teach about the kingdom of heaven, which is simply God's work here on earth during the Church Age. Jesus gave the first four parables publicly to the multitude and the last four privately to the disciples.

This chapter is one of three major discourses by Jesus in the Book of Matthew, the others being the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) and the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24 and 25).

Matthew 13 has sometimes been called the key chapter to the entire book. It contains the view of the kingdom of heaven through the Church Age. When studying, you may find material implying that Jesus taught in parables to shut out certain people who had rejected Him, so that they would not understand. This is inconsistent with the Scriptures. A proper understanding of Jesus' use of the parabolic method is so that more could understand, repent, and follow Him. God is not willing that any should perish.

Remember the very public setting for the first four parables, and contrast it with the private setting for the final four. Jesus knew the audience and tailored the message for those present. When teaching the multitudes, Jesus' pulpit was a boat. The setting for the disciples was inside the house.

The Jewish leaders were denouncing Jesus publicly. At the end of this chapter, the citizens of Nazareth, His home town, also were offended

Despite opposition from the Jewish leaders, and the people's rejection of Him that resulted, Jesus continued in His Father's holy will and taught the

ways of God to sinful men. While many were hardening their hearts and rejecting Him, He continued reaching out in compassion.

In this present age, Jesus builds His kingdom in the face of satanic resistance. This conflict demands of every accountable soul a response either of faith unto salvation or of unbelief unto damnation.

Lesson Aim: To identify principles related to men's response to the Gospel.

Theme Verse: [Luke 8:18](#). Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

Lesson Text

To the Multitude

[Matthew 13:3-8](#)

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; ⁴And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: ⁵Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: ⁶And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: ⁸But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

[Matthew 13:24-33](#)

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: ²⁵But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. ²⁶But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. ²⁷So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? ²⁸He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? ²⁹But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

³¹Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: ³²Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

³³Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

To the Disciples

Matthew 13:44-52

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: ⁴⁶Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

⁴⁷Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: ⁴⁸Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. ⁴⁹So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. ⁵²Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Questions for Study

To the Multitude

1. What do the first two parables reveal about the work of God and the work of Satan in the world?
2. How does a person prepare himself to receive the seed of the Word so as to bear fruit?
3. Discuss traits and symbolism of the tares.
4. How can the church keep itself pure from corrupting influences?

To the Disciples

5. What basic kingdom principles are in focus in the parables of the hid

treasure and pearl of great price?

6. What does the parable of the net teach about the importance of man's present choices?

7. What great task is described in verses 51 and 52? List some ways we can meet this responsibility.

Analyzing the Passage

A parable is a method of teaching a simple truth, using comparisons that the students understand. It differs from an allegory in that it focuses on one specific subject. By using parables, the teacher desires to bring understanding of deep or complex issues. Just as looking at the sun requires a tinted lens, parables aid in comprehending the brilliant light of truth. Christ, in His love for man, used this method to give everyone opportunity to come into the kingdom.

We must be consistent in the interpretation of these parables. The field in the parable of the sower refers to the same thing as the field in the parable of the tares. Jesus Himself interprets the field as the world in verse 38. Likewise, the birds in the parable of the sower represent an evil influence. We can therefore logically conclude that the birds in the parable of the mustard seed are also an evil presence.

The first four parables, given to the multitude, portray the time from the sowing of the seed to the reaping of the harvest (the Church Age) from the earthly viewpoint. The second set of four parables, given to the disciples in private, portray the same age from God's perspective. He is gathering His treasures to Himself.

The final parable shows the responsibilities that believers have in this present age.

Principles and Applications

To the Multitude

1. Laboring with Christ in sowing the Word is the supreme responsibility of Christ's followers (Matthew 13:3). The purpose of sowing the Word is to save men's souls. The seeds of truth and hope need to lodge deep in their hearts. With care and fertilization, the seeds will grow and bear fruit unto salvation. We sow directly when we teach and preach the Word and when we pass out literature to lost humanity. We also sow when people observe that we live according to truth. Many believe it is impossible to live ac-

according to the Scriptures; we must show that, by God's grace, it is possible.

2. The condition of the heart determines how productive the Word is in a person's life (Matthew 13:4-8). Some soils are well-suited to produce fruitful vines; others can hardly support a blade of grass. The good ground in the parable was cultivated soil prepared to support the seed it was receiving. It is logical to assume that the soil would continue to receive special care. The spiritual responsibility is the same—the good soil must be maintained for the seed to bear fruit. We dare not allow anything to choke out God's Word.

3. Satan seeks to imitate the work of God in the world (Matthew 13:24-25, 27-29). Tares and wheat have a similar appearance, draw from the same nourishment, and grow together. Yet tares are not wheat. Likewise Satan seeks to deceive by devising counterfeits to truth and placing them among the authentic. Satan knows the Word of God, but he seeks to destroy through the use of deceptive doctrines, humanistic thinking, hypocrisy, hollow professions, and apostasy. These counterfeits might look like wheat on the outside, but inside they are bitter and rotten.

4. Judgment awaits those who do not bring forth fruit to God's glory, (Matthew 13:30). We are in the world, but not of the world. Although the wheat was among the tares, it remained wheat. The wheat and tares are in the same field. Yet what a vastly different outcome awaits the tares! Those not gathered safely within the kingdom of heaven are to be cast away and burned.

5. Nominal Christianity will grow, spread in the world, and become a haven for all kinds of evil (Matthew 13:31-33). Many religious groups claim an identity with Christ, but their doctrines and practices vary widely. This type of growth is neither natural nor normal. Like a large tree, nominal Christianity has many branches. Sadly, many of these branches provide a nesting place and shelter for iniquity. Nominal Christianity is attractive because it allows a person to live as he pleases while claiming assurance of salvation and of eternity with God. We need to test the spirits and guard against the many birds and branches around us today.

6. Inward corruption characterizes much of professed Christianity in the present age (Matthew 13:33). Satan distracts men from their purposes within the church and is able to draw them away from their source of strength and hope. Without Christ, men are hopelessly bound in iniquity

and continue on a downward spiral. They then lead others in the wrong direction and spread a corrupt gospel in the world.

To the Disciples

7. Christ gave all to provide redemption for the whole world (Matthew 13:44-46). Although man rightfully belonged to his Creator he had chosen to give his allegiance to the enemy and was prisoner in his clutches. Because God so loved the world, Christ laid aside His glory in heaven to come to earth to redeem a people for Himself. In himself, man has nothing of significant value to contribute to the price. Even giving our all is as dust toward the cost of our salvation.

8. In the end of this age, God will cast the evil into hell, but the righteous shall shine (Matthew 13:47-50). Which fish are good to keep and which are to be cast away is evident to the fishermen sent to sort them. Just as tares will not be brought home to the shelter of the barn, the worthless fish will not be brought home in vessels. Both the ungodly and the righteous will receive eternal consequences for the choices they made in life.

9. The responsibility of the faithful servant of God is to continue teaching the Word (Matthew 13:52). This is the greatest work on earth, given to everyone who names the Name of Christ and walks in His ways. Let us not be remiss in this, our primary duty.

Important Teachings

1. Laboring with Christ in sowing the Word is the supreme responsibility of Christ's followers (Matthew 13:3).

2. The condition of the heart determines how productive the Word is in a person's life (Matthew 13:4-8).

3. Satan seeks to imitate the work of God in the world (Matthew 13:24-25, 27-29).

4. Judgment awaits those who do not bring forth fruit to God's glory (Matthew 13:30).

5. Nominal Christianity will grow, spread in the world, and become a haven for all kinds of evil (Matthew 13:31-33).

6. Inward corruption characterizes much of professed Christianity in the present age (Matthew 13:33).

7. Christ gave all to provide redemption for the whole world (Matthew 13:44-46).

8. In the end of this age, God will cast the evil into hell, but the righteous

shall shine (Matthew 13:45-50).

9. The responsibility of the faithful servant of God is to continue teaching the Word (Matthew 13:52).

Answers to Questions

1. What do the first two parables reveal about the work of God and the work of Satan in the world?

God's purpose in the world is to reveal truth for man's blessing, so that he bears good fruit for God's honor and glory. Satan's purpose is to hinder and destroy the work of God. God's work will result in a good harvest, but Satan's work will finally be destroyed.

2. How does a person prepare himself to receive the seed of the Word so as to bear fruit?

Natural soil is prepared for planting by removing rocks and unwanted plants and then tilling the soil fine. The spiritual seeker tills his heart by comparing his life with God's standard as revealed in His Word. He asks questions and seeks counsel. He adjusts his conscience according to the standard of truth. He desires the better things promised in the Bible.

3. Discuss traits and symbolism of the tares.

The tares grow with the wheat but are not part of the crop sought by the husbandman. They are planted by an enemy to choke out the desired crop. Tares and wheat have a similar appearance, but the husbandman will be able to rightly and completely separate one from the other at maturity.

4. How can the church keep itself pure from corrupting influences?

The church keeps itself pure by maintaining separation from the world, adhering to the doctrine of the Scriptures, and living in a fruit-bearing, consistent manner. She walks with Christ, her betrothed, and spurns the invitations of the world so that she may be presented unspotted and without blemish to Him.

5. What basic kingdom principles are in focus in the parables of the hid treasure and pearl of great price?

The pearl is the true church, hidden in the field of the world. Christ was willing to lay aside His glory in heaven, become a man, and lay down His life to redeem the church for Himself. The great sacrifice of Christ for us should motivate us to live for Him. We owe continual praise and thanksgiving for what He has done.

6. What does the parable of the net teach about the importance of man's

present choices?

God's reckoning day is coming. He will judge every man according to the deeds done in this life. Today's choices determine where God, in the final sorting, will place us for eternity.

7. What great task is described in verses 51 and 52? List some ways we can meet this responsibility.

We are commanded to bring forth the treasure of the Gospel.

We do this at home by encouraging and admonishing our families, in the church by teaching, preaching, and fellowship, and in the world through various outreach activities. It is the greatest work in the world.

Summarizing the Lesson

Jesus, the greatest Teacher of all time, taught each lesson clearly, concisely, and specifically to His intended audience. Whether given to the multitudes ignorant of Gospel truth or to His faithful followers, Jesus rings with authority. The question He poses in verse 51 can also be applied to each of us today. Have you heard the truth? Do you understand it? Are you communicating it to others?

Research Guide

Read the parallel accounts of the sower (Mark 4:1-9, 13-20; Luke 8:4-8, 11-15), mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19), and leaven (Luke 13:20-21).