

THIS PRESENT AGE – PART E

What we saw last week was that at this point in the progression of [Matthew](#) that it was clear that Jesus had already been totally rejected as the Messiah. So what we find beginning in [Matthew 13](#) is that Jesus begins to talk differently to the people by using parables. Notice what [Matthew 13:3](#) says,

Mt 13:3 (NKJV) Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow.

In some ways this confused His disciples, so in v10 they ask Him the following question,

Mt 13:10 (NKJV) And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

Now, what Jesus says is critically important because He gives a very important key to understanding what He is doing with the parables. This is what He says in v11-13,

Mt 13:11 (NKJV) He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

In Scripture the word “**mystery**” refers to the revelation of divine spiritual truths that were previously hidden from and therefore unknown by the Old Testament saints. However, now these remarkable truths have been revealed to New Testament believers. So, in [Matthew 13](#), the previously unknown truths that Jesus is unveiling is directly related to the “**kingdom of heaven**”. He says over and over “**The kingdom of heaven is like...**” He says it in vs 11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, and 52 – eight different times.

It is important to understand that the Old Testament gives very, very minimal information relative to the “**kingdom of heaven**”, or in our terms, the church age. Most all of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament relate to the Second Coming and the establishment of the king’s earthly kingdom that we call the Millennium - but not the church age. So, from that perspective you can better understand that what Jesus is giving His disciples is “**new information**” that has not been previously revealed to them. From a spiritual perspective, the “**kingdom of heaven**” is referring to the **unseen kingdom** that exists in the hearts of New Testament believers while their King is physically absent. Christ now rules in the hearts of His people. I.e., if you did not really want to be in this service, there is nothing forcing you to come. If you do not want to read your Bible, you can just lay it aside. We do not have to be obedient to God’s commands if we choose otherwise. Actually we can do whatever we want to do. In a spiritual kingdom, obedience is not something that is enforced, but something that is a privilege and an honor. We reverence Christ because we love Christ. I honor my wife because I love my wife. It is a privilege to honor her.

Normally, the “**kingdom of God**” is seen as having two distinct attributes. The first attribute relates to what is known as God’s **universal kingdom**. Ultimately, everything in life and everything in the universe – both seen and unseen – falls under the absolute sovereignty of God, and is under His universal kingdom. There is nothing that exists that did not come from God and is not under His complete control – not one thing. So, there is the universal kingdom. The second aspect is what is known as the **mediatorial aspect** which represents the fact that God’s rule is mediated through people. To be a part of God’s mediatorial kingdom, the individual must genuinely and sincerely identify with Christ.

Eventually and eternally, no one will be allowed into heaven who has not fully identified with Christ. It must be a genuine identification based on genuine repentance and genuine faith in Christ. What we will clearly see as we go through these parables is that no one who is superficially and religiously attached to the church will be allowed into God's kingdom. It will not happen. In order to be able to be a part of and to enter into God's kingdom, a person must come to genuine salvation through personal faith in Christ. In the church, we may not be able to recognize who the artificial and false believers may be, but God knows, and we can all be assured that He will not allow them to enter into His kingdom.

We can think of it like this. In the current mediatorial kingdom of which we are a part, Christ governs **indirectly** through people. However, in His earthly kingdom, or the Millennium, He will rule **directly**. The “**kingdom of God**” has always existed and it will continue fully into the Millennium and into the Eternal State when the New Testament church as we know it has ceased to exist. It is my opinion only that in the Millennium and in the Eternal State there will be no actual church as we know it. Rather, in whatever way the rule of Christ is administered, what we will be a part of will be called the “**kingdom of God**”. During the time in which we live, the “**kingdom of heaven**” and the church age are considered to be one and the same, and are mediatorial in nature, and this is simply part of the “**mystery**” that Christ is unfolding to His disciples in [Matthew 13](#). Please appreciate that all of this is completely new to them and it surely catches them by surprise. In [Matthew 13:11-13](#) we see that the parables were given for the disciples so that they could better understand the divine truths related to the “**kingdom of heaven**” that had not been previously known or understood. For others, these truths would remain hidden, and for Israel they have remained hidden until this very day.

Now, an important aspect of God's kingdom relates to who are the actual citizens of that kingdom. There have always been true citizens and false citizens, and in the end God is the only One who actually knows who is a true citizen and who is a false citizen. [Matthew 8:11-12](#) speaks of this when it says,

Mt 8:11 (NKJV) And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Obviously, the people that Jesus is talking about in v12 are **NOT** true believers, even though outwardly they may appear to be. This is really a startling statement to the Jews. The term “**many will come from east and west**” refers specifically to **Gentiles**. The Gentiles had much less spiritual advantages and opportunities to know God's truth than did the Jews. However, the Jews had been given everything, but unfortunately they had rejected the very thing they needed the most. They had been given all of the promises and privileges of being God's people. They were integral to God's plan and are still integral to the final outworking of that plan in the end times, but it is not genealogy that determines who enters into God's kingdom, but spiritual faith in Christ. That is why “**all of Israel**” has to be saved.

Now, I want to take a moment and address the phrase that “**the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness**”. As we have often stated, [Matthew 13](#) refers to the “mystery form” of the kingdom ([Matthew 13:11](#)) where the mysteries describe the conditions that will prevail for the church while the King is absent. In order to understand this phrase in [Matthew 8](#), it is very critical to remember that during the church age that the mystery form of the kingdom is composed of both saved and unsaved alike. There are “**wheat and tares**”, and there are “**good fish and bad fish**”. We could say that in this

kingdom that there is the true and there is the false, and that there is outward profession vs. inward possession. Sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish between the two. So, if this aspect of the kingdom that there are both believers and unbelievers in the outward, visible kingdom is not understood, then it can cause a level of interpretive confusion, and one example of this would be our verse in [Matthew 8:12](#). “**Outer darkness**” in that verse is clearly a description of hell, and it says that the “**sons of the kingdom**” will be cast into it. We know that believers do not go to hell. They are not judged for their sins. Only unbelievers go to hell. So, what this verse indicates is that there are people who outwardly identify with the kingdom of God, but who are not inwardly a part of that kingdom. **Not all of the sons of the kingdom are believers.** This is clearly seen in [Matthew 13](#) with the parable of the wheat and the tares. It is very obvious from this parable that the true sons and the false sons may not be that distinguishable from one another. You can imagine that if the true believer is not living as they should, and the false believer is very religious, then the two may not be distinguishable from one another, hence “**wheat and tares**”. I am certain that if the rapture actually occurred on a Sunday morning during church services in America that there would be many people attending who would be left behind.

The same principle is identified in [John 15:1-8](#) where Jesus talks about the branches that do not bear fruit. He indicates that some of the branches will be cut off and burned. I.e., they are not really a true part of the Vine. [John 15:2](#) and [6](#) say,

Jn 15:2 (NKJV) **Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**

Jn 15:6 (NKJV) **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.**

It is the same idea that Jesus says in [Matthew 7:21-23](#) when He says,

Mt 7:21 (NKJV) **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**

The people described in these three verses in [Matthew 7](#) outwardly seemed to be true believers, but Jesus did not see them that way. So, obviously, people can be “superficially” attached to the church, but not truly attached to Christ. [Romans 2:28-29](#) says it this way,

Ro 2:28 (NKJV) **For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is not* from men but from God.**

Now, I do not want to overly emphasize the obvious, but this entire subject of true believers vs. false believers is really one of the most critical issues facing the church today, and especially the last days church. This separation of the true and the false happens at “**the end of the age**”, and it happens simply because there are true believers and false believers co-existing in the church at the same time – and for the most part, very often they are not distinguishable from one another. There will be an obvious separation at the rapture, and then a separation at the Second Coming, and a final separation at the end

of the Millennium. In His grace, God allows both to exist together. Stated another way, there are multitudes of people who are a part of the visible church, but who are not a part of the true church, and God in His mercy allows the false believers to be exposed to true believers who should have a strong and lasting testimony of Christ on those who are only superficially attached. This co-existence of believers and unbelievers in the church has always been the case, but Scripture seems to indicate that it becomes even **more prevalent** in the very last days, and especially the church age of Laodicea of which we are a part. Scripture indicates that even in the Millennium when Christ is fully ruling over the earth, that at the end there will be unnumbered multitudes who Satan will gather into a rebellious army that comes against Christ.

Now, I want to take a few moments and look at the time element identified in [Matthew 13](#). All of the parables that are listed refer specifically to events and characteristics that occur during that period of time between the first coming of Christ and the Second Coming of Christ. The actual end of this time period is identified twice in [Matthew 13](#). [Matthew 13:39-40](#) says,

Mt 13:39 (NKJV) The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.

[Matthew 13:47-50](#) says,

Mt 13:47 (NKJV) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

This “**end of the age**” is the specific time of Christ’s return in what we call the Second Coming. In [Matthew 13](#), the parables that are given encompass the entire church age and the 7 year Tribulation from the beginning of the church in [Acts 2](#) until the Second Coming of Christ in [Revelation 19](#).

Now, we need to keep a couple of hermeneutical principles in mind as we interpret the parables of [Matthew 13](#). First, some of the parables are actually interpreted by Christ Himself. He gives the parable, and the disciples ask Him to interpret the parable for them – which He does. He does not do this in every case simply because He knew that the disciples understood the meaning and intent of the parable, so they did not have to ask Christ to interpret it for them. So, for those parables, the specific meaning should be evident. Likewise, all of the other parables should be in harmony with the interpretation that Jesus gives to a couple of the parables. I.e., there should be a uniformity of interpretation.

Secondly, some of the parables are using imagery and terms that are also used in other parts of Scripture – such as the word “**leaven**” in v33. In Scripture, the word “**leaven**” has a very specific meaning and use that needs to be maintained. The disciples fully understood the meaning of the word with its implications. For instance, they fully understood the parable of the treasure that was found in the field whereas we do not. This type of incident happened all the time, however, we do not understand it well simply because we do not bury valuable items in fields. We would think that to be a foolish thing. Rather, we take our valuables to the bank, or put them in a safe deposit box. However, in Jesus’ day,

they did not have banks as we know banks. So, for the disciples Jesus is not introducing new terms, but terms that they were very familiar with and clearly understood.

[Matthew 13:52](#) also gives us some help in understanding how the parables are actually arranged.

Mt 13:52 (NKJV) Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure *things new and old.*"

Jesus is talking here about the scribes who are “**instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven**”. A scribe was someone who was a learner, interpreter, and teacher of the Old Testament, and specifically the Law. So, what Jesus was doing here was telling His disciples that they were going to become what we might call the scribes of the New Testament truths. The phrase “**instructed concerning**” means that the disciples were the ones who were now becoming the repository for the truth of these parables. The NASB actually reads “**every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven...**”. The term “**householder**” referred to the individual who was responsible for providing ample supplies of food, clothing, and whatever a family member might need. So there are some “**new**” truths and some “**old**” truths that are being given – some truths that they would clearly understand and some truths that they would not understand.

In [Matthew 13:1-2](#), the chapter begins with words that identify that what Jesus is saying is being done initially in a **public** setting.

Mt 13:1 (NKJV) On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ² And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

Then in v36, it says,

Mt 13:36 (NKJV) Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field."

So, what we have are two distinct times when Jesus taught. The first was in a **public setting** with many people listening, and then in a **private setting** with His disciples. That is why the disciples waited until they were in private to ask their question concerning the parable of the tares that Jesus had given to the people. What we glean from this is that there are four parables given in a public setting and three parables given in a private setting. Some of the parables are “**new**” and some are “**old**”. The first four parables spoken in public represent the “**new**” parables, or truths that have not previously been revealed, and the three parables spoken in private represent the “**old**”, or truths that have previously been revealed, and ones that most likely would be understood by the disciples. That is why when Jesus asked them in v51 if they “**understood all these things**” (things spoken in private), they said to Him “**Yes, Lord**”.

So, the “**new**” truths relative to the “**kingdom of heaven**” are represented by the parables of (1) the soils, (2) the wheat and the tares, (3) the mustard tree, and (4) the leaven in the meal. These are all “**new**” truths that the disciples had not heard before. The truths previously known and those that would be understood are represented by the parables of (1) the treasure in the field, (2) the pearl of great price, and (3) the dragnet.