

MATTHEW 13 – PART A

In today's study we are going to begin to look at [Matthew 13](#) and the 7 various parables dealing with this present age – what we have defined as the church age, or the inter-advent period between the first coming and the second coming of Christ. This is really a very important chapter in Scripture and probably more important than we really understand it to be. It is Jesus personally giving an analysis of the church age in which we live. Actually, this is the first place that some definition and doctrine is given relative to the church age – even though the church is not specifically mentioned. What Jesus does is to provide several characteristics of the church age, and that is why it is so important to us because we live in this age and we need a clear understanding of its characteristics.

We saw in an earlier study that [Matthew 13](#) also refers to the “**mystery form of the kingdom**” (v11) where the mysteries describe the conditions that will prevail for the church while the king is absent. What we need to continue to remember is that during this particular time that **the mystery form of the kingdom is composed of both saved and unsaved alike**. There are wheat and tares, sheep and goats, and good fish and bad fish in the church that are sometimes very difficult to distinguish between the two. For me personally, I know that there have been seasons in our church where I have preached hard and preached strong relative to salvation. So, if we do not understand this aspect of the kingdom that there are both believers and unbelievers in the “outward, visible” kingdom, then sometimes it can cause us to become somewhat confused.

So, the reality of this part of the mystery form of the kingdom is that there are people who outwardly identify with the kingdom, but they simply are not a part of the kingdom. A person can be a part of the visible kingdom we call the church, but not know the King. In fact, this entire delusional fantasy that someone is going to heaven just because they are a member of a church is very prominent in American churches, and Baptist churches especially. A person can be superficially and artificially attached to the branch, but not a part of it. Judas is a good case in point. In [John 15:1-8](#) the real evidence relative to genuine salvation as found in those verses is the evidence of fruit bearing. Is your life bearing spiritual fruit for Christ? That is the question.

In approaching [Matthew 13](#), we need to observe that the truth about the church as a “new” entity in God's program has not even been mentioned yet. In our terminology, it is still a “**mystery**” to the disciples. The idea of the church, or even the Second Coming of Christ as we know it, was completely foreign to his disciples. The actual Greek term for “**church**” is not even mentioned until [Matthew 16:18](#). In fact, any mention of the rapture of the church has not yet been revealed. I think the obvious reason for that is because the kingdom is still being offered to the Jews. Miracles are still being performed, truth is still being taught, and the call to repentance and faith is still being communicated.

So, the question that we have to ask is really very simple. If Christ came to offer the kingdom to Israel and they rejected the King, then what happens to the kingdom? That is exactly what [Matthew 13](#) deals with. The simple truth of the matter is that **the kingdom of God on the earth cannot be established until Israel receives their king**, and so what [Matthew 13](#) does is provide insight relative to the **postponement** of the establishment of the earthly kingdom. The kingdom was offered, Israel rejected the King, and therefore the immediate fulfillment of the kingdom was temporarily suspended. Do you remember what the message of Christ was when He first started preaching? It was “**Repent for the**

kingdom of heaven is at hand” ([Matthew 4:17](#)). Do you remember what the message for John the Baptist was when he first started preaching in the wilderness? It was **“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”** ([Matthew 3:1-2](#)). I.e., the King and the kingdom are at hand, but the Jews refused the kingdom and nailed the king to a cross, so that is why Christ is returning the second time – to establish the kingdom that was refused the first time.

Now, I am sure that someone is going to ask the question as to why God just did not dismiss Israel? I mean, Israel rejected Christ, they nailed him to a cross. Well, the answer to that is simple. It is because God had made irrevocable, irreversible, immutable, and unconditional promises to Israel that He was going to fulfill. [Romans 9-11](#) talks about this in great detail from a sovereignty perspective – how God will sovereignly reestablish Israel at the end of the Tribulation. In fact, we know that the apostles will actually rule over the twelve tribes. [Matthew 19:28](#) speaking about the apostles, says,

Mt 19:28 (NKJV) So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Even in the new Jerusalem, there will be a great emphasis on Israel. [Revelation 21:12](#) says,

Rev 21:12 (NKJV) Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names of* the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

We know that God has already begun to put all of this into motion. The Jews have been regathered to Israel, there are Jews still living all over the earth, and it seems that very often the center of attention in the world is this small little tiny nation in the Middle East. God is moving towards fulfilling His promises to Israel. We know that there is coming a time when they will see their King, look on Him whom they have pierced, and be saved. [Zechariah 12:10 and 14:3-4, 9](#) says,

Zec 12:10 (NKJV) "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

Zec 14:3 (NKJV) Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. ⁴ And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.

Zec 14:9 (NKJV) And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be-- "The LORD is one," And His name one.

Most all of this will happen at the Second Coming, and at that time, God will establish His earthly kingdom out of Jerusalem just like has been prophesied. So what happens in the middle? What happens between now and then? Some theologians have called the church age a mere “parenthesis”, an interim, something temporary and provisional in God’s overall program. We know that for the Jews that all of this was a mystery, something that they simply did not see in the Old Testament, and that is why there

had to be this teaching in [Matthew 13](#) so that Jesus could describe this period between His first coming and His Second Coming. This is a period of time where the kingdom of God goes on without the King of that kingdom being physically present. It is not an external kingdom, but an internal kingdom where Christ our King rules in our hearts. Jesus is not physically present on the earth as He will be in the Millennium. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. There are 8 specific references in the New Testament to Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father.

Now, we need to provide a very introductory overview of each of these parables. A parable only has one main truth, so any details given in the parable are only provided to enhance that one meaning. If Jesus gives additional meaning to the parts of a parable, then that is what governs its interpretation. However, keep in mind that all of these parables are given by Christ as a general overview of various qualities and characteristics peculiar to our present age - the church age.

The first parable is the parable of the sower and is one that Jesus fully explained. It begins in [v3-9](#) and is explained in [v18-23](#). A man simply went about to sow seed. The sowing of the seed depicts the preaching of the gospel. Some reject it and some receive it. Some hear it and accept it for a while and then fall away. Some hear it and bring forth fruit. One of the clear observations is that we the church will never win all of the world to Christ. Why? It is because even though people will hear the gospel, they will adamantly reject it. If they reject the gospel, they are rejecting Christ.

The second parable is the parable of the wheat and tares in [v24-30](#). Jesus explains the parable in [v36-43](#). A man sowed good seed in his field and while he was asleep, his enemy came and sowed tares alongside the good seed. Unfortunately, the tares look exactly like the wheat, and they bear no fruit and they crowd out the good seed. It is difficult to really tell the difference between the two until the time of harvest. Jesus said this in [v37-39](#).

Mt 13:37 (NKJV) **He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. ³⁹ The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.**

So, here we have the picture of true believers and false believers side by side until the harvest. The principle is that within the church there will always be true believers and false believers, and very often they will not be that distinguishable from each other. I would add that the more that the church weakens the gospel and is weak in doctrine, the more that it strengthens the inclusion of the lost within the church. Jesus clearly identifies that there will be many false believers in the church planted there by the enemy.

The third parable is that of the mustard seed. It is a very small seed that becomes a large tree. The church had a small beginning, but it has grown to be very large and influential throughout the world. It will be a haven for birds – which some commentators believe to be false teachers.

The fourth parable is that of the leaven. Leaven was used in bread to make it rise. Here the leaven speaks of the influence of worldliness within the church. When we become a Christian, God calls us out of the world. We are in the world, but not of it. When someone uses leaven, they take some leaven from a previous loaf and add it to the next loaf, so that the influence of the leaven gets perpetuated. During

the church age, there will be an evil influence within the church – both false teachers and false doctrine. Much of that false teaching will be like leaven in the church to cause the church to become worldly.

The fifth parable is that of the hidden treasure. A man is out in a field and he comes across a treasure that had been left there by someone else. So, he goes and buys the field so that he can have the treasure. The treasure is salvation. Here is a man who discovers the truth about eternal life, about redemption, about being saved, and he does everything he can do to make sure that he has this salvation. There will be people during the church age who, once they come to the realization of true salvation, they will be willing to give up everything they have to be a part of God's kingdom.

The sixth parable is that of the pearl of great price. This is about the man who knew what he wanted, and so he goes about looking earnestly for it. He too is willing to sell all that he has to get this pearl of great price. The difference between this man and the man in the previous parable is that the first man sort of stumbled onto the treasure, whereas this man has spent a great deal of time in seeking the treasure that he so desperately wanted. God works very differently in people's lives to bring them to Christ. One size does not fit all, and it is important that we understand that reality.

The seventh parable is that of the dragnet. A dragnet was cast into the sea and taken to shore. Once there, the good fish were separated from the bad fish. This is a picture of the great separation between sheep and goats that will take place at the end of the church age when Christ comes back – both in the rapture and at the Second Coming. [Matthew 13:49-50](#) says,

Mt 13:49 (NKJV) 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."

Now, if we take all of these together, we would readily agree that we can see each of these characteristics in the present church age. We have preached the gospel throughout the world, and many have received the message and many have refused the message. We know that within the church that we have both true believers and false believers. We know that the enemy is constantly attacking the church, constantly sowing tares within the church. We know that the church has had great influence in the world, and has living within its own wall false teachers. The influence of both the good teachers and the false teachers has spread like leaven. We know that some just stumble across the gospel and some seek it earnestly. Lastly, we know that there will be a final judgment and separation where Christ makes all things right.

Now, these are the mysteries of the kingdom, and they have been given to us so that we can understand them. However,, many in Jesus' audience did not and could not understand what He was saying because they were given to them in parables. The same is often very true today. [V10-11](#) explains,

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

¹¹ 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.

However, notice what Jesus says in [v12](#),

Mt 13:12 (NKJV) 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.

What Jesus is stating in this verse is that for those who have, “**more will be given**”. Those who have what? It is those who have received from God the truth that is needed for salvation and those who have believed the truth of the Word of God. To them more will be given. **The more of God’s truth that you accept and believe, the more truth you will be given, and the more God will enlighten you.** Some of this is explained in the story of the unfaithful servant where what he was given was taken away from him and given to those who had been faithful. So, the more that we respond to the light of God’s revelation, the more light we will receive. The more you study, the more you will understand. The very opposite is also true as well. The one who has been given light but has rejected it, even the light that he has been given will be taken away. I believe that we see this every day in people’s lives – people who have rejected the clear truth of God’s Word and now they have absolutely no interest whatsoever in it. The truth of the matter is that God has taken it from them, and they have no clue that that has happened to them. They believe that they can come to God any time that they please, but nothing could be any further from the truth. [John 6:44 and 65](#) say,

Jn 6:44 (NKJV) No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jn 6:65 (NKJV) And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

The truth of God is not something with which a man can just trifle and ignore. Just think of what happened to Israel. They rejected the clear evidence of the deity of Christ, finally crucified Him, and today remain in utter spiritual darkness. If a person lives in accordance with the light that Christ provides to them, then more light will be given. However, if they refuse that light, then deeper spiritual darkness will prevail. Everyone we know is right now either receiving the truth or rejecting the truth, either responding to the light that God has given, or refusing to respond to the light that God has given. In spiritual terms, no one remains static and stationary, and the more that someone refuses Christ, the deeper the darkness becomes. [Matthew 6:23](#) says it this way,

Mt 6:23 (NKJV) But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

So, the reason that Christ speaks to these people in parables is because the parables are a form of judgment on them. They have rejected the light and the clear evidence of His person, so He judicially removes the light from them. [Matthew 6:13](#) explains it this way,

Mt 13:13 (NKJV) Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

The simple fact that the lost man has no interest in the things of God is not just a statement about his ignorance, but in reality it is as much a statement of God’s judgment on his life. The more that someone rejects the clear revelation of God’s Word, the deeper becomes the spiritual darkness in their life. This is as frightening as it can become – for someone to continue to reject the clear teaching of Scripture. The spiritual pit of darkness just gets deeper and deeper and deeper and the prospect of salvation less and less and less.