

MATTHEW 13 – PART B

This morning we will continue 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. In our last message, we looked at a very important principle relative to these parables and that was that **the mystery form of the kingdom is composed of both saved and unsaved alike**. That is a very critical and important reality to always keep in perspective. It will actually help you to be able to better understand what on the surface appear to be difficult and even contradictory passages (which they are not). Jesus says that there will be wheat and tares, sheep and goats, and good fish and bad fish **in the church** and functioning together at the same time. The problem is that they are not always easily distinguishable from one another. I say this with grace and compassion, but I know of men in some churches who serve in positions of leadership that in my judgment are not even saved. They have influence and exercise that influence, and generally to the detriment of the church.

We also looked at why Jesus spoke in parables. It was to reveal truth and to conceal truth at the same time – which it did. **The more of God’s truth that you accept and believe, the more truth and understanding you will be given, and the more God will enlighten you.** However, the converse is also true **that the more that someone refuses to listen to Christ, the deeper their spiritual darkness becomes**. [John 14:21](#) has an amazing verse about God manifesting Himself to those who really want to know Him. It says,

Jn 14:21 (NKJV) He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

The Greek word for “**manifest**” is “*emphanizo*” and in its normal use it simply means to make known to make apparent, to declare. However, in the context of [John 14](#), the nuance of the word is that it is much deeper than just declaring something to someone. What Jesus is saying here is that God is willing to make Himself **intimately** known and understood to a particular kind of person. Unfortunately, it is not difficult to look around in any church and get an idea of those who people are serious about their faith and those who are not, those who are just going through the motion of religion without any emotion whatsoever. This is very normal and very commonplace in the average church. Some people listen intently and some people never listen and are distracted in the service with doing other things. Some people take notes, and some people have no interest in taking notes. Some people are Sunday only Christians, and some believers are at church every time the doors are opened. Some Christians are very faithful to both read and study the Word, and other church-goers never open the Scriptures, and often do not even bring them to church. So, as we come to [Matthew 13](#), what we understand is that Israel has already rejected their King, and the kingdom of God that was destined for them has been postponed. It is the time between His first coming and His second coming that is called the “**mystery form of the kingdom**” and it describes the church age as we know it.

Before we actually begin with the exposition of the parables, we need to identify some specific characteristics of parables. A parable may have a good number of various details in it, but in reality the details are not the chief focus. Generally, a parable has only one primary meaning that it is trying to convey. That does not preclude there being parallel truths in the parable as long as they contribute to the one single primary meaning of the parable. The parallel truths that can be gleaned from some of the

details normally occurs when the person giving the parable actually interprets the parable, and therefore provides some additional information for us. For instance, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus gives specific information that is important for us to understand. [Matthew 13:36-44](#) 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." ³⁷ 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. ⁴⁰ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

One of the key phrases is “so it will be at the end of this age”, or at the end of the church age. All of this information that Jesus gives in this explanation is very specific information and because Christ has given importance to the specific details, then we too are to give it the same level of importance. So, this particular parable has an abundance of parallel truth to the main truth. However, this is not normal for the majority of parables, and the worst thing that we can do is to give some spurious meaning to every word or every phrase that the parable itself does not give.

In a parable, the author generally uses common everyday pictures of life to convey spiritual truth. So, in order to understand a parable, we have to understand the function of the everyday events or items. To understand a figure of speech that is used, the reader has to understand the nature and function of the figure of speech. For instance, in [John 10:7-9](#), Jesus is giving this analogy of a shepherd and his sheep, and He says this,

Jn 10:7 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

He is saying that He is the actual door into the sheepfold. Now, his listeners understood exactly what He meant in that because often the shepherd would actually sleep in the doorway, in the actual gate. Even though we know what a door or a gate is, we may not understand this in the actual historical setting that Jesus spoke it. So, the reader has to understand the nature, function, and purpose of a gate – and specifically **a sheep gate**. What that gate provides in the natural realm is what Christ will provide in the spiritual realm.

Another main issue relative to understanding the parables is for us to determine why the parables are even being spoken. We have already spent a great deal of time showing that the purpose of these parables is to help the disciples understand what is going to happen during the church age, and what the characteristics of the church age will be like. So, if we do not understand that, then we cannot properly interpret the parables. Understanding the question or the problem that is being addressed is what actually safeguards the interpretation.

One last major point relative to parables is that in the gospels Jesus uses parables constantly. For instance, [Mark 4](#) is a similar passage with many of these same parables in [Matthew 13](#), and when Jesus gives a parable, it normally is dealing with the subject of the “kingdom of heaven” or the “kingdom of God”. For instance, just peruse through [Mark 4](#) and especially [v10-12](#),

Mk 4:10 (NKJV) But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. ¹¹ And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, ¹² so that '*Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.*' "

It is all about the “kingdom of God”. There is an invitation given to enter the kingdom. The kingdom will grow and permeate the world with its influence. A personal decision is demanded. The end will entail a great separation. Those who seek earthly security are foolish. The unfruitful have a great cause for personal concern. Watchfulness is required. Only doers will be able to stand in the judgment. For instance, Jesus brings His final conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 7:24-26](#) when he says,

Mt 7:24 (NKJV) "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: ²⁵ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: ²⁷ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

The kingdom will reverse all earthly values and even relationships. Disciples have no claims. These are the kind of truths and principles that are provided in the parables of Christ – and the more that I have studied them, the more serious they have become to me.

Now, we want to begin to look at the first parable of the soils in [Matthew 13:1-9](#).

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. ³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸ But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Now one observation that is very essential to this first parable is what Jesus told His disciples about it in [Mark 4:13](#) when He said,

Mk 4:13 (NKJV) And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?

In Jesus' mind, this parable is critical, and here He adds a certain spiritual weight and importance to it that we cannot ignore. He says that there is something about this parable that will help us have a better understanding of the other parables, and I believe that is one reason why Jesus actually interprets this parable with much more detail than is provided in other parables. I am sure that as we go through each of these parables that most of this will seem somewhat elementary to you. It is the nature of the parable to be elementary, to just use common, everyday events and items. However, please understand that the simplicity of the truth is what was hidden from most of the crowds who actually heard Jesus speak these parables. They walked away without understanding. It appears that for someone to casually dismiss these parables may be an indication of a more serious issue in their life.

In all of the parables, Jesus uses terms and ideas that everyone in His audience would understand. We are talking about farmers and seeds and leaven and fields and treasures and fishing and wheat and birds and fishing nets – all of those being the kind of elements of everyday life that Jesus' audience would clearly have understood. They did a lot of farming, they did a lot of fishing and they clearly understood about a man finding a treasure in a field. They fully understood those pictures.. In the first parable, Jesus mentions four different kinds of soils – the “**wayside**”, the “**stony places**”, the “**thorns**”, and finally some “**good soil**”. Most of the fields in Palestine were long, narrow fields, and separating the fields are these paths, called the “**wayside**”, that the farmers used to walk on when they were going from one place to another. The paths were normally narrow, and they would have a lot of traffic on them (both pedestrian and animals), so the paths quickly became very trodden down and hard. So, when the farmer would sow his seeds in the field, the seed that fell on the hard ground was very easy for the birds to come and eat, or for others who were walking on the path to trod the seeds down. This path was a place that the farmers did not cultivate, so for the most part, the soil always remained fairly hard. The seed simply could not penetrate the hard soil – and so the seed bore no fruit. Now, obviously there is a very real spiritual application of this to our lives relative to a hard heart – and Jesus explains that later. Once again, please appreciate that this particular detail is not the primary meaning of the passage, but just a supporting element for the main truth.

The second soil type was what Jesus called the “**stony places**”. This was not in reference to places where there were a lot of stones. The farmers knew that they could not farm places that were full of rocks, so they would remove all of the rocks from the fields. This is referring however, to the limestone rock beds that often were very near the surface of the soil, but they were not readily seen. So, when the seeds were planted, there simply was not enough soil for the plants to take good root and they just were not able to get the kind of moisture from the soil that they needed to grow properly. So, when the sun got hot, the plants would die off. They started out good, but simply could not handle the heat. The soil simply lacked depth and therefore the plants could not last.

The third type of soil is the “**thorny**” ground, or the ground that had weeds embedded within it. When the seed was planted, the weeds eventually overwhelmed the seed and choked the seed from growing and they were not able to produce any fruit. We all understand about weeds in a garden. For the last two years, I had a certain weed that grew up in my garden and it was so difficult to remove. Tim Blank and I went to the Clemson Extension to find out what it was and it was called “chamberbitter”, and because it bore seeds, if you did not get rid of it early, the seeds would fall into the soil and come up in the soil in spring. It has been a full time job getting rid of this weed so that my garden could grow.

Next, we have the good soil – deep, dark soil with plenty of nutrients. This is the soil from which the farmer is able to get a harvest – some 30, some 60, some 100 fold.

So, beginning in [v18](#), Jesus begins to explain the parables to His disciples. We know from [v37](#) that the Sower is the Lord Himself

Mt 13:37 (NKJV) He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.

Even though this information is provided in another parable, since all of these parables are given at one time, they should maintain a consistent meaning from one parable to the next to help provide Jesus' overall continuity. Next, we find from [v19](#) that the seed is the "**word of the kingdom**" that is preached and taught.

Mt 13:19 (NKJV) When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

In [Luke 8:11](#) in a parallel passage on the soils, we have this stated,

Lk 8:11 (NKJV) "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

In [Mark 4:14](#), another parallel passage on this parable, it says this,

Mk 4:14 (NKJV) The sower sows the word.

In essence, anyone who sows the word of God is a sower. So, this parable is about **the sowing or proclaiming of the message of the gospel**. It is about proclaiming the truth about Christ and His kingdom. It is about communicating the message of salvation to people who are lost. However, and this is very important, when we do, we need to appreciate that there will be many different kinds of hearts into which that message is sown. In fact, the different kinds of soils into which this message of the gospel is sown is really the emphasis of this parable. **It is the main point.** The result of someone hearing and accepting the gospel is dependent on the condition of that person's heart. Some hearts are simply hard and callous, some hearts have no depth, no hunger to them, some hearts are so entangled in the things of the world that they just cannot hear, and then some soils are fertile for hearing and receiving the message. I would state at this point that the number of soils in the parable is not the issue. The issue is that there are various conditions of people's hearts that will prevent them from receiving the message of God's Word, and there are some who will receive it. We know from [v19](#) that the message is sown in a person's heart.

Mt 13:19 (NKJV) When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

So, the soils clearly identify the various conditions of people's hearts when the gospel is preached. Some will be receptive to the Word, **but most people will not be receptive.** That is a very important truth to understand when we preach the gospel to people. Today, statistics are very clear that the most receptive places in the world for receiving and believing the gospel are in second and third world countries. The most fertile places to spread the gospel are in places where people's hearts have not

become hardened and calloused to the Word of God, in places where the cares of this life have not just consumed people.

In the spiritual environment in which we live, it should be readily obvious that people's hearts are cold and callous to the gospel. Most of the people with whom you share the gospel will not be receptive to your message or your concern. The end times is an apostate time, a "cold" time to share the gospel in America, yet we know that God has in fact prepared people's hearts to hear His message of love, forgiveness, and grace. In the next message, we will look in greater detail at these various kinds of soils and why people are not inclined to hear the gospel with an open heart. The greater our understanding of this parable of soils as explained by Jesus, the greater will be our understanding of the other parables He provides.