

Lesson 20: Review of Matthew 13:1-43: "Parables of Soil and of Conquest"

We come to Jesus' first parables.

What is a parable? A parable is a method for communicating a primary truth. Jesus told parables (short stories), which paralleled a key teaching and Truth. Contrary to what we may think, parables were not necessarily intended to make Truth plain. One had to contemplate and think. Taking it one step further, Jesus told His disciples that parables can clarify the Truth or hide the Truth; Harden the heart or soften the heart!

We will begin by providing some thoughts to the question, "Why Parables?" (Matthew 13:10-17). Then, we will provide some explanation of the "Parables of Two Kinds of Soil (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)", and the "Parables of Conquest (Matthew 13:24-43)."

Why Parables? (Matthew 13:10-17)

Jesus "told" parables (13:3a). He *told* stories; stories that contained great treasures hidden beneath the surface. The disciples were very interested in knowing "why" He spoke in parables instead of simply "teaching" the truth plainly. Jesus' answer to the disciples is alarming to many people. He answered them saying, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."

In other words, parables effectively concealed the truth from people. Jesus did not candy coat His answer. He spoke plainly, explaining to the disciples that the reason He spoke in parables was because these people had hearts that were "calloused", ears that were "hardened", and eyes that were "shut". They had ignored and rejected the word of the Prophets and the Word of Scripture and their hearts were woefully resistant to the Truth! At the same time Jesus made it very clear that He withheld no helpful teaching about His Mission and His work from those people (i.e., disciples) whom He had chosen to follow Him (see 11:25,26; 13:11,16).

A word of caution is in order. As to why Jesus spoke in parables is a very offensive teaching to some people. But, if this be the case for you it could signal the same "calloused heart", the same "hardened hearing", and the same willful "shutting of the eyes". Would it not be better to pray, asking God to "show", "reveal", "unveil" the Truth to you? Would you not be better off "begging" the Lord to have mercy on you and to reveal the hidden things to you (Matthew 11:26) so that you might "hear", "see" and "understand" (13:15b)? Do not let the difficult sayings of Jesus offend you.

Parable of Two Kinds of Soil (Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23)

There are two kinds of soil according to Jesus in this parable: productive and unproductive. The unproductive soils, which Jesus brings to our attention in this parable, are "hard" (v4), "shallow" (vv5-6), and "thorny/weedy" (v7). The productive soil in the parable is simply called "good soil" (v8).

The parable does not find fault with the sower/farmer or the seed. Jesus makes no direct reference to the sower or the seed *except* to say that it is a *message* which is spoken and a message *heard*. The key Truth of the parable is that when a person hears the *message* about the Kingdom of God it grows or dies in the heart of the hearer. If it flies right over their head (13:19), or they hear the message and become so happy to hear such good news but soon turn away from it (13:20), or they hear the message but so many other things in life have taken priority (13:22)—the message is of no effect. It dies.

However, for those who hear the message and that message takes root and grows, it produces a rich harvest for the one who sowed the seed. In other words, the seed grew exactly where the farmer expected and produced exactly what the farmer expected because that soil was good. It was good because the farmer prepared the soil so that when "seed" landed it would grow and produce!

I want to encourage you: the simple fact that you are reading this and participating in this study of Matthew gives good indication that the "message of the kingdom" has been sown in good productive soil! (**Phil.1:6**)

Parables of Conquest (13:24-43)

The three parables, the parable of the weeds and the parable of the mustard seed, and parable of yeast are very similar at the core. These parables indicate that the kingdom of God will prevail in conquest over the kingdom of the devil. The parable of weeds tell us that regardless of the wicked work of the devil's servants to pollute the fields (Church) of the King the conquest belongs to the King (Jesus). The parable of mustard seed and of yeast tell us that despite its seeming weakness and hiddenness in the world, the Kingdom of the King will permeate the whole earth (nations) and will be a blessing to the nations. Is Jesus your Sovereign King? Are you living with a sense of defeat or victory? It is time to live in the strength of our conquering King!

Questions for Matthew 13:44-58 "Treasuring Christ"

1. From the notes on page 1, **A)** what impressed and/or helped you? **B)** Explain "A".

Introduction to Matthew 13:44-58: We continue our study of parables. Our first and primary focus will be on "Treasuring Christ" drawn from 13:44-46. In these three verses we have two parables which bring to the forefront the unsurpassed value of the kingdom of heaven. However, we will see from the parable of the net that the heart of the teaching also revolves around "treasure" even though there is the terrible warning of judgment. You will also see that our third section deals with a group of people who did not treasure Jesus' person or presence in their city. Let's become the kind of people who treasure Christ.

2. Read Matthew 13:44-46. "Parables of Treasure and of a Merchant": **A)** Look at the two parables in this section. Which parable is about a treasure "found", and which one is about a treasure "sought"? **B)** In the parable of "the treasure" (v44) what clues do you find that emphasizes the great value and great advantage of gaining and possessing the treasure? **C)** Parable of Merchant. If the merchant was seeking "fine pearls" in life what do you think he was truly looking for? **D)** What do you think Jesus is telling "us" about Himself by telling us that there was "one of great value"? **E)** Look up Philippians 3:7-8. What personal connections can you make between these two parables and the Philippians passage? **F)** What disciplines are you practicing in order for you to better comprehend the value of Christ as a personal treasure?

3. Read Matthew 13:47-52: "Parables of Judgment and Privilege" **A)** Read 13:47-50. What does this parable illustrate? **B)** Who are the bad fish and who are the good fish? **C)** Explain what happens to the bad fish. **D)** Read the following verses and comment on the comfort they give you in light of the parable on judgment: John 10:14; John 17:24; 2 Timothy 2:19 **E)** Read 13:51-52. What privilege and responsibility do you have as you grow in your understanding of the Truth of God in Christ? **F)** What "treasure" have you gained through your study of Matthew that you will "bring out of the storeroom" and give to someone close to you?

4. Read Matthew 13:53-58: "Missing the Treasure Through Unbelief" **A)** Look up Luke 4:14-16: What town was Jesus' "hometown"? **B)** How did they first respond to Him? (see Matt. 13:54 and compare with Luke 4:22) **C)** Why the big "change" in attitude between 13:54 and 13:57? What do you think offended them? (You can refer also to Luke 4:23-27) **D)** What "sin" lay at the heart of their being "offended" with Jesus? (see 13:58) **E)** What aspects of the message of Christ offends people the most in our day and age?