

Message #46

Matthew 13:1-3

As we come to Matthew chapter 13, we come to one of the most important chapters in the book of Matthew. It is also one of the most misunderstood chapters in Matthew. This chapter has been butchered by many and, as a result, there is great confusion. Dr. Gaebelien said, “We have often said if this one chapter would be rightly understood by the professing church, the consequences would be the most far-reaching” (p. 259). The sad tragedy is that most Christians believe that these parables tell the story of an “optimistic dream” that the church will be enlarged and grow to become this wonderful, large, blessed operation. Nothing could be further from the truth. These parables are not designed to teach this in the least. Now the main point of this chapter is this:

JESUS CHRIST USES PARABLES TO TEACH WHAT GOD’S PROGRAM WILL BECOME ON EARTH UNTIL HE COMES BACK AS JUDGE TO ULTIMATELY SET UP HIS KINGDOM.

QUESTION #1 – How many parables are actually found in this chapter?

If you read most commentators, they will suggest that there are seven parables in this chapter: 1) The Sower (13:3-9); 2) The Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30); 3) The Mustard Seed (13:31-32); 4) The Leaven (13:33); 5) The Hidden Treasure (13:44); 6) The Pearl of Great Price (13:45-56); 7) The Dragnet (13:47-50). However, if we carefully look at the chapter we discover that technically there are eight because verse 52 presents the “Householder.”

QUESTION #2 – What does the word parable mean?

The actual word “parable” means to place one thing beside another thing so a comparison may be made. One uses an illustration or an analogy or a figure to make an understandable comparison (Smith, p. 338). It has often been said that a parable is an earthly story designed to illustrate a heavenly truth.

QUESTION #3 – Why did Jesus speak in parables?

There are two reasons in this chapter why Jesus spoke parables:
(Reason #1)–To reveal truth to some; **(Reason #2)**–To conceal truth from some (13:11).

QUESTION #4 – What truth were the parables designed to teach?

It is quite clear that the parables were given to communicate truth concerning the “mysteries of the kingdom” (13:11, 34-35). In other words, the specific truth that Christ is going to reveal to some and conceal from some is truth concerning the “mysteries of the kingdom” (13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47).

Now a mystery in Scripture is something God has not previously revealed. It is not something He does not previously know. So these parables are designed to give us new insight about the kingdom, which has not been previously revealed. What has been revealed to this point is that Jesus Christ is the King offering a kingdom to Israel and the thing Israel needed to do was to repent. **We can expect that since Christ is revealing mysteries here, there will be facts revealed by these parables, which to this point have not been revealed.**

Specifically, Jesus Christ is going to reveal new information about the time period prior to the establishment of the kingdom, which has now been postponed. Had Israel responded to Christ, the kingdom could have been immediately established; but since she did not respond, the kingdom is going to be postponed and Jesus Christ is presenting, in parabolic teaching, the truth as to what earth will be like prior to Him establishing His kingdom.

What Christ does now is to give a series of illustrative parables to show the disciples what is going to happen in the program of God, on earth, in view of the fact that Israel had rejected Him and in view of the fact that He is leaving.

QUESTION #5 – What phrase is critical to Matthew 13?

Six times in these parables a key phrase surfaces—“The kingdom of the heavens is like” (13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47). This phrase can no longer mean “repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” It is no longer a reference to the promised kingdom that Israel had just rejected. **“The kingdom of heaven is at hand” is not the same message as “the kingdom of heaven is like.”**

In these parables, Jesus describes what will happen on earth in the arena of religion until He comes back to eventually establish His kingdom.

Matthew 13:1

“On that day”—that is the day that Jesus had been rejected by the scribes and Pharisees (12:38) and at the time when there was a general apathy toward Him. In other words, there had been a national rejection of Him as King. It is no coincidence that He is by the sea because the sea represents that part of creation that connects to other nations.

Matthew 13:2

Notice they who have rejected Him are in Israel’s land and Jesus is out in the sea.

Matthew 13:3

Now we may observe from **verse 3** that He spoke many things in parables. The crowd heard only four parables—the sower, the tares among wheat, the mustard seed and the leaven. The crowd just heard the parables; they did not hear the interpretation of the parables. Only the disciples received the interpretation. Only those right with God understand things from God.