

# The Parables of the Kingdom

Matthew 13:1-17

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## **Introduction:**

Today we begin a new series in Matthew's Gospel on the Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven.

- The classic definition of a parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."
- The word **parable** is carried over from the Greek word *parabolh*.
  - *parabolh* is a compound word
    - *para* means "beside"
    - *bolh* means "to cast" or "to lay."
  - And so a parable is a story about something from everyday life that is cast or laid up beside whatever it is that you are trying to explain...
    - It is a simple, familiar story that is used to explain something that is not so simple and familiar.

Jesus does not begin to use parables for the first time in Matthew 13.

- For example, there was the parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.
  - But in Matthew 13, it seems that He begins to use to use parables without explaining what they mean...
    - He tells the story and leaves it to the people to ponder it and figure out what it means.
- There are seven such parables given to us in Matthew 13 that we will be looking at over the next few weeks...
  - Today,
    - rather than taking up the first of these parables,
    - I want to begin with a general introduction to all of them.

## **I. First of all, I want you to see that the parables in Matthew 13 are given to explain the true nature of the kingdom of heaven.**

A. The chapter opens with Jesus coming out of the house where he had just been speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees who were rejecting Him...

1. We are told that when He went out of the house,
  - a. He sat down by the sea and great multitudes gathered to Him...

- He then got in a boat where everyone could see Him and sat down to teach...
    - the multitude standing on the beach to listen.
  - It appears that Jesus did this to accommodate the many who wanted to hear Him when He was in the house...
    - but could not get close enough because of the crowd so long as He stayed inside.
    - So there He is, sitting a boat with a huge crowd of people around Him.
- b. It is in this setting that we are told:
- “Then He spoke many things to them in parable.”
  - And, if you take a look at the parables in Matthew 13,
    - you will see that they are all parables about the kingdom of heaven
      - (or the kingdom of God which is the same thing)...
2. Now I want you to think about this multitude that was listening to Jesus when He spoke these parables.
- a. What were they like?
- What do we know about them?
  - What did they think about the kingdom that Jesus had been preaching to them up until this time?
- b. Well, I think from what we have seen in Matthew’s gospel so far,
- we could easily say that they were not sure what to think about the kingdom Jesus was proclaiming!
- 1) They had always expected that as soon as the Messiah came, everything would immediately change in very visible ways!
- They expected that the Messiah or the Christ would be a man of great honour that would lead them in victory against the Romans and against all their other enemies!
  - They expected Him to be a man whose kingdom would be greater than Solomon’s in that it would have even greater wealth and greater power!
- 2) But instead there was this carpenter from Nazareth who did some pretty impressive miracles and who often stung their hearts with His convicting teaching...

- but who gave no real evidence as far as they could see of setting up the kingdom of God.
    - He talked about God's kingdom a lot, but He never seemed to **do** anything to establish it.
  - Sometimes they got their hopes stirred up that maybe He would do something to get the kingdom going,
    - but it was never long before they were disappointed again.
  - And besides,
    - it was becoming increasingly obvious that the Jewish leaders did not have much use for Him...
    - How could He be the Messiah if they even their esteemed leaders did not recognise Him?
- c. That pretty much sums up what the majority of the multitude was thinking about Jesus.
- It seemed clear that the kingdom of God, as they understood it, had not yet come.

#### B. But in Matthew 13,

- Jesus presents the true nature of the kingdom of heaven with the use of parables.
    - He presents it as a kingdom that is very different than what the people were expecting it to be.
1. First there is the parable of the sower...
    - In this parable He shows them that there are many who hear the gospel of the kingdom that never bring forth fruit.
      - Not everyone comes to follow the Messiah!
      - The popular conception of the kingdom among His hearers was that all of Israel would receive the word and bear fruit when the Messiah came.
        - There was no notion that only a few would hear and bear fruit!
  2. Next, there is the parable of the Wheat and the Tares.
    - In this parable Jesus shows that even among those who outwardly accept God's kingdom, there will be many that are false...
      - and who will not be discovered until the Day of Judgement.
      - Jesus' hearers would have expected unity such as came about under David.

3. Then there is the twin parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven...
  - In these, Jesus teaches that the kingdom will have very small beginnings...
    - and that it's growth will be very slow, but outwardly and inwardly.
  - His hearers expected the kingdom to appear all at once in its full glory!
    - in much the way that Jesus describes His return!
    - They confused His first coming,
      - which was to be like a seed planted in the ground of humiliation,
      - with His second coming in the clouds with glory.
4. Another set of twin parables follows...
  - that of the Hidden treasure and the Pearl of Great Price.
  - In these parables,
    - Jesus shows that each person who truly sees the glory of His kingdom (something that the multitudes were unable to do), will be willing to give up everything to follow Him...
  - Now the Jews did not expect to deny anything when the Messiah came!
    - His coming was to be a time of gaining more of what they had,
      - not a time having to sacrifice!
    - Jesus was talking about a kingdom that was quite different than the one they were expecting.
5. And finally, Jesus concludes with the parable of the Dragnet, which is very much like the parable of the wheat and the tares...
  - showing that there will be many false sons in the kingdom who will be sorted out at the end...
    - Perhaps Jesus adds this parable at this point in order to make it clear that even though there would be tremendous growth and tremendous dedication,
      - there would still be many false sons of the kingdom at the end.

TRANS> What a difference between what Jesus presents here about the true nature of the kingdom and what the Jews were looking for!

C. The very things that Jesus presents in these parables were the things that caused the multitude to question His Messiahship!

1. For them, Jesus could not be their coming king because His kingdom was not, in their minds, the kingdom that they expected.
  - A rejected Messiah was just not possible in their minds.
  - His ultimate rejection and crucifixion was the last straw, the great stumbling stone that assured many that He could not be the one.
  
2. It was not what they expected, neither was it what they wanted!
  - For them, it was not fruit bearing that was important...
    - Fruit is nice, but what about the political mess they were in?
      - What about the economy?
      - What about their enemies?
      - What about all the factions among the people that kept them from pulling together?
    - These were the things they needed a Messiah for!
      - Just like people today, they were not so concerned about holiness...
      - They were concerned about social, economic, and political reform.
        - And of course if you were to really examine these concerns,
          - the real concern of each is for his or her own prosperity and comfort.

TRANS> So you see that in His parables, Jesus clarifies what the true nature of His kingdom is all about in contradiction to what everyone thought.

- It was to be a kingdom that many rejected, that had many false sons, that grew slowly, and that required great personal sacrifice!
- All this important doctrine that the multitudes needed to understand if they were to be blessing in Jesus Kingdom!

## **II. But why does Jesus present such important instruction in parables?**

- If He really wanted to help the multitudes understand the true nature of His kingdom, why didn't He speak in terms that they could understand?

A. The disciples asked Him this very question!

- In v. 10 it says:
  - Matthew 13:10: And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

1. Now just try to imagine how these disciples must have felt!

- a. They themselves were not even able to understand what these stories were supposed to mean.
  - How, then, could such a method possibly benefit the multitudes who knew even less than they did?
  
- b. We are so familiar with these parables and what they mean that it might be hard for us to identify with the disciples at first...
  - Chances are, the first time you ever the parable of the sower, you also heard the interpretation.
    - What's more, you now **know** that when Jesus came into the world,
      - He had to bear the shame and humiliation of the cross.
        - It is not so surprising for you to think of His kingdom as a kingdom that involves a large degree of rejection...
      - You also know about how Judas' betrayed Him...
        - It is not so hard for you to understand it as a kingdom with false sons in its pale.
      - You know how long it has taken for the kingdom to grow and how slowly it grows in you...
        - It is not hard for you to think of it as a mustard seed and a bit of leaven.
      - And you know how Jesus' followers have to deny themselves and take up their cross if they would have eternal life...
        - You know about the sufferings that many have endured for His sake...
        - It is not hard for you to think of His kingdom as one that requires denying everything.
  
- c. It is not hard for you to understand the things that are taught in these parables
  - because you have seen what the kingdom is like...
    - but it was nearly impossible for the ones who first heard Jesus speak these things to connect what He was saying with what they understood the kingdom of God would be!
    - Nobody, including the disciples themselves,
      - expected the kingdom to be the way these parables present it!

TRANS> And so, is it any wonder that the disciples want to know why Jesus has resorted to such an unproductive method of teaching?

2. Don't the disciples here remind you of those we looked at a couple of weeks ago who asked for a sign from heaven?
  - a. It seems that they were just trying to help out...
    - If Jesus was really wanting to people to believe that He was the Messiah, He should do some great sign...
      - Not just healing people and things like that, but making the Sun go backwards or causing it to thunder and lightening when there were no clouds.
      - If Jesus did that—then everyone would follow Him!
  - b. In that same well-meaning way, the disciples are now concerned about their Master's teaching...
    - If He really wanted to help people,
      - He must stop speaking in riddles!
      - Plain instruction was what they needed to hear!
        - Not parables!
      - So they asked Him,
        - Why do you teach the people in parables?

TRANS> Jesus' response is rather startling!

- B. He tells them that He is teaching in parables because it is not given to the multitudes to understand!
  - In verse 11, it says:
    - Mat. 13:11: 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."
1. A couple of things are very clear in these words!
  - a. First of all, that a person cannot understand the nature of His kingdom unless understanding is given to Him...
    - No one naturally understands how the kingdom Jesus describes in these parables could be the kingdom of God!
      - Is the kingdom of God to be a kingdom largely rejected? a kingdom with false sons? a kingdom with very small beginnings and slow growth? a kingdom with that requires great suffering and sacrifice?
      - This is supposed to be God's kingdom?
    - Yes it is, and Jesus suggests here that nobody will understand this kingdom unless that understanding is especially given to him.

- That is why later on when Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus says to him...
  - “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in Heaven!”
  - Peter did not attain that understanding on his own...
    - It was given to Him by God.
    - No one understands unless understanding is given to him...
      - As Paul said, the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to Him.

TRANS> So the first thing that is clear from Jesus’ words is that understanding must be given to a person before he can understand His kingdom.

- b. Secondly, Jesus’ words make it clear that this understanding is not given to everyone—only to some.
  - 1) Jesus tells His disciples that understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom has been given to them, but not to the multitude as a whole.
    - Clearly there is a distinction made...
      - Clearly there are many that are excluded from understanding.
      - That is the way it was then, and that is the way it is now.
  - 2) There are many people who simply do not see anything special about the kingdom of God...
    - There may be times when it looks like it is really going somewhere and they hop on for the ride a little while...
      - But as soon as they realise that there is a lot of rejection and false sons and slow growth and sacrifice,
        - they decide that this cannot possibly be the kingdom of God because those mysteries of the kingdom have not been revealed to them.
      - They cannot see the value of a kingdom like that

TRANS> So these are the two things that are clear from Jesus’ words in verse 11:

- 1) That no one can discern His kingdom unless God has given Him understanding.
  - 2) That such understanding is not given to all—only to some.
2. In verse 12, Jesus goes on to explain that the difference between those who are given understanding and those are not will become greater and greater over time!



- a. If a person is given just a bit of understanding from God,
    - that understanding will become greater and greater!
    - God has begun a work in that person and He will bring it to completion!
  - b. On the other hand, if a person has not been given understanding by God,
    - He may think he knows all about God's kingdom,
      - But even the understanding he thinks he has will be taken away...
      - It will be shown to lack all true substance.
  - c. So you have the one with understanding growing and increasing more and more,
    - and the one without understanding moving into greater and greater darkness.
    - For one, the word of God is like a light that shows him the way...
      - for the other is like a light that blinds him.
    - Matthew Henry illustrates this with pillar of fire that stood between Israel and the pursuing Egyptian army...
      - The same pillar that illuminated the Israelites was a pillar of darkness to the Egyptians.
3. In v. 13, Jesus explains why He speaks in parables to the multitudes...
- He says,
    - Matthew 13:13: "Therefore I speak in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, neither do they understand."
  - a. The multitude had seen and heard quite a lot since Jesus had been with them.
    - They had seen and heard the Son of God in their streets, walking among them and healing their diseases and preaching to them!
      - He had come to restore them to true communion with the Father!
      - He had come to bring repentance and holiness!
      - He had come to grant to them the forgiveness of sins!
    - But His ministry had done them no good because they were not looking for these things...
      - They did not want true communion with the Father!
      - They did not want repentance and holiness!
      - They did not really think they needed the forgiveness of sins!
    - This is what Jesus' Kingdom of Righteousness was all about,

- but this was not what they wanted.
- 1) Therefore, when Jesus was presented to them, they did exactly what God had told Isaiah His people would do when he ministered to them...
    - In verses 14-15, Jesus says:
      - And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.’
  - 2) The thing is, if they do not what communion with God and holiness and repentance and the forgiveness of sin...
    - Therefore they cannot grasp a kingdom whose primary purpose is to bring them these things.
    - Consequently, the more such a kingdom is presented to them, the more they despise it!
      - A kingdom of weakness and suffering will be despised by them!
        - If their immediate comfort is more important to them than holiness, they do not want this kingdom...
          - They do not savour the things of God, but the things of Satan.
          - They do not want to the cross, but only the crown...
          - They do not want to die in order that God might raise them up, but they want God to raise them up as they are.
- b. And so, this is the reason Jesus speaks to them in parables!
- 1) The parables will lead them into greater and greater blindness...
    - They will be a complete mystery to them because it is not given to them to understand.
    - But they will have a completely opposite effect on Jesus’ disciples because to them it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom...
      - The disciples will grow in their understanding and the multitudes will move into greater and greater darkness.
  - 2) Now I grant to you that the disciples themselves did not have much understanding of these parables when Jesus spoke them...

- Even after He had privately explained the parables to them, their understanding was not all that much different than the understanding of the multitudes...
  - but at the same time, there was a very significant difference!
  - The disciples were given the beginnings of understanding from God the Spirit—and that understanding would grow...
    - The difference lay in where all this would lead!
- a) For the disciples, these parables would stay in their minds and as they saw the Lord Jesus rejected by His people,
  - delivered up to be crucified, betrayed by one in their own number, the small number of His followers, themselves called to suffer for his sake...
  - The parables would take on more and more meaning for them as they went on!
    - The little understanding that God had begun in them would grow into greater and greater understanding!
- b) But for the multitudes it would be just the opposite...
  - For them the parables told of the things they despised about the kingdom Jesus was offering to them!
  - The more this kingdom was manifested, the more they would despise it!
    - The more they would shut their eyes to it and stop up their ears so as never to be converted!
    - They despised the whole idea of being converted!
      - Conversion was much too painful for them!
      - Identifying with a despised and rejected Messiah was not at all what they wanted!
      - And so into deeper darkness and deeper hardness they would go...
        - Just the opposite of Jesus' disciples!
  - c. You see, my friends, it all comes down to whatever is important to you!
    - 1) For Jesus, establishing us in holy fellowship with God was important enough for Him to bear rejection, humiliation, and even the shame of the cross!
    - 2) When God gives you understanding,

- You begin to see that re-establishing fellowship with God is a very costly business,
  - but that nothing matters more.
  - You learn to glory in the cross, in the rejection and the humiliation and the small beginnings and the sacrifice!
- You see the glory of the kingdom in the same way you see the glory of open heart surgery!
  - or in the same way that an athlete sees the struggle to get the finish line first!
  - The cross is glorious because the cross is the way to life!
    - The kingdom of Christ is glorious because it is the kingdom of the cross that leads to life!

TRANS> Do you see the glory of this kingdom of our Lord?

- A kingdom that is rejected by many?
- A kingdom that has many false disciples?
- A kingdom that has small beginnings and that grows very slowly?
- A kingdom that calls for great suffering and personal sacrifice?

### **III. If you do see the glory of this kingdom, the Lord Jesus has something to say to you!**

- He says to you:
  - Matt 13:16-17: But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.”

A. Consider yourself blessed because you see what so many others do not see!

1. When you see so many Christ rejecters and Christ despisers and those who are indifferent to Him...
  - a. It ought to make you weep because you see what they are missing...
    - You ought to pity them and have compassion for them because they see glory in the darkness.
    - They rejoice in the gilded dung-hill of worldly pleasures and dreams.
      - They have set their heart on what can never truly and lastingly satisfy!

TRANS> You ought to shed many tears for them...

- b. But you ought to rejoice for yourself because your eyes have been opened to see the glory of Christ's kingdom...

- You see that by means of His suffering on the cross, you are reconciled to God!
  - And you see that as long as you are in this world, it is your privilege to suffer for His sake as He transforms your life for His glory!
2. And you need to give all the glory to God for your understanding, because remember...
- If you understand, it is only because He has given you the gift of understanding!
  - You did not come to glory in the kingdom of Christ by your own wisdom or goodness...
    - You came because God took your sinful, spiritually dead, corrupt heart and gave it life by His Holy Spirit!
    - He caused you to love what you once hated and to hate what you once loved.
      - He caused you to love what is truly worth loving,
        - and to despise what is ugly and dying and passing away.
      - Praises be to your God,
        - for you would have never come to see the glory if He had not brought you.
        - You see because He has given you understanding.
        - Consider yourself most blessed because you see what so many others don't see.
- B. Secondly, consider yourself most blessed if God has given you to understand Christ's kingdom because there is so much more to come!
1. What you have now, dear child of God, is only a small beginning—only a tiny taste of what is to come!
- a. In verse 12, Jesus said, "Whoever has, to him more will be given and he will have an abundance!"
- This is a wonderful promise!
  - Once God has begun to give you true spiritual understanding, He will not stop until you have an abundance!
    - Jesus prayer—just before He went to the cross—was that we would see the glory He had with the Father from before the foundation of the world...
    - You do not see that glory yet—
      - But that is what you are moving toward if you belong to Jesus!

- b. Oh don't I hate to see a Christian who has but a slender understanding who is not yearning for more!
    - who is not hungering and thirsting for the word of God...
      - yearning to learn more of Him and to know more of His grace!
      - Believe me, dear child of God, you have only just begun to see the glory that God has prepared for you!
2. I want you to think about the disciples!
- a. I showed you that the understanding that they had when Jesus spoke these parables was not all that different from the understanding that the multitudes had!
    - The parables of the kingdom did not jump out at them all at once...
    - They had to ask Jesus for the meaning because they did not automatically think of the kingdom in the ways that Jesus was illustrating it by those parables.
      - They had a lot more growing to do!
      - Even after Peter confessed that Christ was the Son of God,
        - Peter immediately tried to dissuade Him from going to the cross!
        - His understanding was still very crude and very imperfectly formed...
          - But what made the disciples so different from the multitude was the fact that God had begun to give them understanding!
  - b. And through all the struggles of this world, that understanding was going to grow and grow and grow!
    - And it will grow in you too if it has begun!
      - It will grow into nothing less than an abundance!
      - But if it is not growing, then you had better get on your knees and plead with God!
        - The understanding that God gives is an understanding that grows.
    - It may be small now, but that does not matter so much...
      - because if it is from God, it will grow!

TRANS> And so my brothers and sisters, consider yourself most blessed if you have eyes that see and ears that hear...

- first, because you have what so many don't have...
- second, because what you have will grow into an abundance.

C. And now thirdly, you should consider yourself most blessed if you have understanding of Christ's kingdom because you have what many of God's choicest servants longed to have but did not have.

- In v. 17, Jesus speaks of all those righteous men and prophets who lived before He came...

- Matt 13:17: for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

1. From the time of Adam until Jesus, there were thousands of righteous men and prophets who longed to see the Lord Jesus Christ!

- But they could only see Him through prophecies and ceremonies...

- only a shadowy, sketchy outline of Him.

- Even Isaiah's glorious vision in the temple with the smoke and the blazing glory and the seraphim crying out holy holy holy did not equal what the most humble disciple of Christ has seen...

- For now Christ has come in the flesh and has shown us the glory of the Father in His cross!

2. If you have trusted in Christ crucified, Isaiah once envied you—because he wanted to see that, but all he got to see was the vision in the temple.

- I don't mean to say that that wasn't a very glorious thing for Him to see...

- But if you are a Christian, you have seen something much greater in Christ crucified!

- Let me tell you how the cross is greater...

- It is greater because in the cross you see more of the holiness of God than Isaiah did...

- That is what He was struck by—

- what made him worship...

- what made him cry out that he was a man of unclean lips!

- But when you see the cross, you see the Son of God bearing the guilt of your sin—bearing the shame of that sin—in your place!

- You see that before God could cleanse you (or anybody else),

- no one less than the eternal Son of God had to suffer the Fathers' wrath on that wretched tree!

- You see how the contemplation of that task caused this mighty One—this Lion of the Tribe of Judah—

- to sweat great drops of blood in anguish!
- Behold the glory of the holiness of God in Christ crucified!
- Isaiah's vision—as glorious as it was—is nothing compared to that!

3. And I say, did Abraham rejoice to see the day of Jesus?

- Did he not rejoice in the confirmation of God's promise when Isaac was born to the dead womb of his wife—when she was much too old to have a son?
- And again, when God provided a sacrifice in place of Isaac with the Ram caught in the thicket?
- Did Abraham not receive Isaac in faith as one risen from the dead?
- But how much greater is the confirmation of God's love and mercy to you now that Jesus has come!
- You are the envy of Abraham because he only dreamed of seeing what you see!
- Yes, he rejoiced in the promise, and in the Ram that was provided...
  - But how much more is God's love confirmed to us who have seen how He gave His only Son to die for your sins!
  - God commends in His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!

Consider yourself most blessed because you have now seen what others only longed to see!

- Your eyes have seen the King of Glory!
  - In Him, you see the lively image of God shining forth by which you obtain salvation and perfect happiness!
  - Blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear!
    - Blessed be our God, for He has done marvellous things for us and we are glad.