

Matthew Chapter 13

Verses 13:1-3: On one of the busiest days of Jesus' earthly ministry He gave an extended series of parables, (seven in Matthew and four in Mark, including one not given in Matthew). This is the turning point in Matthew's gospel. Already sensing His impending rejection, Jesus now expresses the "mystery" form of the kingdom that will feature the church.

His early ministry involved a proclamation of the spiritual principles of the kingdom. To bring in a political kingdom before men were born again would be a travesty. Therefore, an interval is now announced between the Messiah's original appearance and His final return.

That interval is the church age, during which believers are citizens of the kingdom that is within them (Luke 17:21).

This is the third of 5 discourses featured in Matthew.

Matthew 13:1-2 "The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side." "And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore."

He had probably, been resting in Peter's home, which was right on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. This multitude of people had probably, been waiting for Jesus to appear again out of the house. He was so pressed by the large number, that He cast out a little way from the shore. His voice would carry well across the water, as well.

Verses 3-10: The first parable is set in an agricultural context. "A sower went forth" refers to the ancient seed sower, planting a crop. Jesus later interpreted this parable Himself. The seed depicts the Word of God (verse 19), and thus the sower is the gospel evangelist.

The "way side" is the path trampled through the field. It was packed hard and the seed found no root, thus the "fowls" (demons; verse 19, wicked ones), snatched it away. Here there was no response at all to the gospel.

The second category is called "stony places" or the rocky ledge beneath a thin, shallow layer of soil. This thin crust would warm quickly causing the seed to sprout instantly but without adequate roots or moisture. Thus, the "sun ... scorched" the crop and it "withered away."

The third group of seeds fell "among thorns" that had not been plowed. The thorns (wild growth), choked out the crop. The "good ground" represents well-plowed and prepared soil capable of producing a large crop. The statement "Who hath ears to hear" goes beyond physical hearing and implies an inner spiritual reception of truth.

This prompted the disciples to ask why He had spoken to them in parables. Whereas before, He had used parables to illustrate His messages, now they formed the basis of the message.

Matthew 13:3 "And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;"

This section introduces a new subject, a new approach, and a new method of teaching by parables. "He spake ... in parables," a common method of teaching in the Near East, used to convey spiritual truth through a series of earthly comparisons.

"Parables" were a common form of teaching in Judaism. The Greek term for "parable" is "long analogy"; often cast in the form of a story. Before this point in His ministry, Jesus had employed many graphic analogies (5:13-16), but their meaning was fairly clear in the context of His teaching.

Parables required more explanation (verse 36), but their meaning was fairly clear in the context of His teaching, and Jesus employed them to obscure the truth from unbelievers while making it clearer to His disciples (verses 11-12). For the remainder of His Galilean ministry, He did not speak to the multitudes except in parables (verse 34).

Jesus' veiling the truth from unbelievers this way was both an act of judgment and an act of mercy. It was "judgment" because it kept them in the darkness that they loved (John 3:19), but it was "mercy" because they had already rejected the light, so any exposure to more truth would only increase their condemnation.

Matthew 13:4 "And when he sowed, some [seeds] fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:"

"By the way side": The fields were bordered by paths beaten hard by foot traffic and baking sun.

In this chapter, we will see seven parables; and we will see why Jesus spoke in parables. Parables are stories that have a deep hidden spiritual message. In this particular message, He was speaking about simple farming methods, so the educated would not discern what He was saying.

Jesus came to the common people. They would understand about sowing seeds. The explanation that Jesus gave was so excellent, that I won't go into much detail about the meaning here.

Matthew 13:5-6 "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:" "And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away."

"Stony places": Very shallow soil atop a layer of bedrock. From the top, it looks fertile, but there is no depth to sustain a root system or reach water (verse 21).

Matthew 13:7 "And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:"

“Thorns”: Weeds, the roots of which were still in the ground after plowing had been done.

Matthew 13:8 "But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold."

Jesus was describing the different types of people who hear the message of God and the effect it has on them. As He explained it in a few verses below, look at our church goes today, and you will be able to recognize every one you know.

The amazing thing to me, about the Bible is that it never goes out of date. It is just as current now, as was thousands of years ago. The message is the same, because God never changes.

Matthew 13:9 "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

This is an unusual statement, because we all have our two ears hanging on the sides of our head. In some cases, that is the only use (to decorate the head). You see, even though we hear with our physical ears, it does not mean that we receive the message in our inner being.

Jesus was saying, listen with your understanding and receive this message in your hearts. Those of you who are capable (Christians), receive the message that the world cannot understand. In other words, He was going to tell us a secret that would help us understand Him better.

Matthew 13:10 "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?"

The disciples did not at first understand why Jesus did not just say exactly what He meant. Jesus did not want these unbelievers accepting the message with their minds. Jesus wants us to accept by faith (not earthly knowledge), the things of God.

This is the very reason that Noah's Ark has not been found and photographed for the whole world to see. God does not want our heads to believe; He wants our hearts.

Verses 11-13: The Savior's reply is that only the disciples are to know the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." A "mystery" in the Bible implies a sacred secret into which one must be initiated in order to understand it. The mystery revealed would be the new form of the kingdom during the interval between the first and second advents.

Matthew 13:11 "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."

“It has been given to you to know”: Here Jesus clearly affirms that the ability to comprehend spiritual truth is a gracious gift of God, sovereignly bestowed on the elect (verse 11). The reprobate ones, on the other hand, are passed over. They reap the natural consequence of their own unbelief and rebellion, spiritual blindness (verse 13).

“The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”: “Mysteries” are those truths which have been hidden from all ages in the past and revealed in the New Testament. Many specific doctrines of the new Testament are identified as “mysteries” (Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:51; Eph. 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:26-27; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16).

Jesus revealed to the people He wanted to know the mysteries. I have discovered that we never fully understand the mysteries of God. Every time I pick up the Bible and read a Scripture that I have read a hundred times before, God will reveal something brand new to me.

The more we search the Scriptures, the more we understand it seems. Some unsaved person can read the Bible over and over and still not understand. The Bible is a spiritual book, and can only be understood through the spirit.

Matthew 13:12 "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."

To me, this Scripture above is just saying, again, that if we have the Spirit of God within us, our understanding will grow and grow. On the other hand, if we reject the teacher (Holy Spirit), we won't even be able to retain what we read with our physical eyes.

Matthew 13:13 "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."

“Because they seeing see not”: Here Matthew seems to suggest that their own unbelief is the cause of their spiritual blindness. (Luke 8:10), however, emphasizes God’s initiative in obscuring the truth from these unbelievers (“to the rest it is parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand, Isaiah 6:9”). Both things are true, of course. Yet we are not to think that God blinds them because He somehow delights in their destruction (Ezek. 33:11).

Again here, Jesus was just explaining that a saved and unsaved person can look at the same thing and get two totally different messages. The unsaved has their understanding darkened, so that they do not understand.

Matthew 13:14 "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:"

Quoted from (Isaiah 6:9-10). God is the same God in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament. Isaiah was just saying the same thing again.

Matthew 13:15 "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and [their] ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with [their] eyes and hear with [their] ears, and should understand with [their] heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

You see above that these people had, on their own volition, closed their eyes and ears to the truth. They had to take the scales off their eyes and the stoppers out of their ears that they might see, hear, and understand. It all comes about at conversion to Christ.

Matthew 13:16 "But blessed [are] your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

It is a blessing from God to be able to see, hear, and understand the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit must be our teacher and our guide. This is a free gift from God; to the blessed of God.

Matthew 13:17 "For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous [men] have desired to see [those things] which ye see, and have not seen [them]; and to hear [those things] which ye hear, and have not heard [them]."

(John 8:56; 1 Peter 1:9-12).

You see, in the Old Testament there was a shadow covering the truth. The way to the Holy place was not open to them. The temple's curtain had not been torn. They understood only in part. They knew God only through the priest in the temple. The great High Priest of all eternity had not come to them yet.

Verses 18-19: Jesus interpreted this parable Himself (in verses 18-23). "The sower" is Christ working through the agency of His disciples to spread the gospel throughout the world. No longer is the message to be restricted to the house of Israel, but is to be declared to all people.

The "word of the kingdom" is the gospel proclamation of Jesus as King and is not to be limited to an Old Testament, Jewish-only message. These parables clearly illustrate that the church is the present-day form of the kingdom.

The key to interpreting the reception of the seed into the ground is the term "understandeth," meaning to comprehend by believing faith (verse 23). The unsaved listener does not understand and does not receive the seed, whereas the believer both hears and "understands" the message, and his life produces fruit to prove it.

Matthew 13:18 "Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower."

Jesus was going to show them how to understand this parable.

Matthew 13:19 "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth [it] not, then cometh the wicked [one], and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side."

"Word of the kingdom": The message of how to enter God's kingdom, the sphere of salvation, i.e., the gospel ("word of reconciliation" in 2 Cor. 5:19).

“Wicked one”: Satan (1 John 5:19). The gospel never penetrates these souls, so it disappears from the surface of their understanding, seen as the enemy snatching it away.

You see, Jesus was saying when you receive the Lord; the old devil will quickly try to tell you that you didn't get anything. The devil will also, bring numerous temptations to lure you away from Jesus. Your troubles begin when you receive the Lord.

The devil does not want you to be able to stay with your new found faith. This particular parable indicates someone who was too shallow to keep the faith.

Verses 20-23: The “stony places” are shallow-hearted individuals who “anon” (at once), receive (outwardly), the message with “joy.” This emotional convert is not truly born again, for “hath he not” root and withers away.

The one who is “among the thorns” (cares of this world), is the carnal, worldly convert, who never really breaks with his past. Worldliness and materialism “choke the word” in his life, and he is finally “unfruitful” (unsaved).

The one who received seed in the “good ground” is the one who both heard the word and understood it, “which also beareth fruit” (evidence of true conversion). While such evidence may vary in its amount, all true believers will produce some fruit.

Matthew 13:20 "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;"

“Stony places”: Some people make an emotional, superficial commitment to salvation in Christ, but it is not real. They remain interested only until there is a sacrificial price to pay, and then abandon Christ.

Matthew 13:21 "Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

You see, some people who receive the Lord are on fire for God, then troubles come along, and they lose their faith. Unlike Job, who stood against all the problems Satan could throw his way, these fell at the first great problem that came, and went back into worldly living.

Matthew 13:22 "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."

“Seed among the thorns”: These people make superficial commitments without a true repentance. They can't break with the love of money and the world (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; 19:16-21).

Matthew 13:23 "But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth [it]; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

“The good ground”: As there were 3 soils with no fruit, thus no salvation, there are 3 kinds of good soil with fruit. Not all believers are equally fruitful, but all are fruitful (7:16; John 15:8).

Matthew Chapter 13 Questions

1. In the first two verses, Jesus preached from where? Why?
2. How did Jesus speak to them?
3. Why?
4. How many parables are in chapter 13?
5. What is a parable?
6. What kind of people did Jesus come to?
7. Why did they spring up quickly?
8. How can you recognize who our church goes of today are?
9. Why is our Bible still current today?
10. In verse 9, what is unusual?
11. What is Jesus sharing with us in the parables?
12. Jesus did not want them to understand with their _____?
13. What does Jesus want?
14. Can we ever fully understand?
15. How is the only way we can understand?
16. If we reject the Holy Ghost as a teacher, what will happen?
17. What is different about the saved and unsaved when studying a Scripture?
18. Who, in the Old Testament, prophesied about this?

19. What kind of eyes and ears are blessed?
20. Why had the Old Testament people not understood?
21. Who steals the truth from the new converts?
22. Are all your problems suddenly gone when you receive the Lord?
23. What is indicted by the stony places?
24. Who was the Old Testament character who withstood temptations and troubles of all kinds?
25. Who do the thorns represent?
26. What kind of sermons do they bring?
27. Verse 23, describes whom?
28. Why is there 30, 60, 100?