

INTRODUCTION

The book of Matthew is an amazing book. It shows that Jesus was the expected Messiah that fulfilled the prophecies, but in unexpected ways.

Matthew shows by Jesus' genealogy that he was descended from David and could be the rightful heir to the throne. Matthew shows that Jesus was worshiped as a King, by wise men from the East. Matthew shows that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as prophesied, the city of David. Matthew shows that Jesus had a herald in John the Baptist, just like other kings to announce their coming. Matthew shows that Jesus had a coronation ceremony. It was his baptism, and his Father, and the Holy Spirit attended and this was the fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1. Matthew shows that when Jesus began to minister, he taught the people and he healed them. His ministry condemned the false shepherd teachers of Israel as in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel 34, written hundreds of years before his coming. In fulfillment of Ezekiel 34, Jesus was the good shepherd; he healed the sick, he bound up the injured sheep, he brought back the straying sheep, he sought the lost and he opposed the strong that would take advantage of the sheep. Jesus showed that he was God; he calmed the storm, raised a girl from the dead, and forgave a lame man his sins before he healed him.

In the previous two chapters of our text today, chapters 11 and 12, we saw a number of different encounters with Jesus and various responses to him. **But Jesus did not meet their expectations.** Even John the Baptist asked him, "are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" The Pharisees rejected him as the Messiah when he broke their traditions by healing on the Sabbath. For the first time their hate boiled over to thoughts of murder.

Everyone expected the coming Messiah, but Jesus did not fit the bill. Everyone expected the Kingdom of God to come by the Messiah conquering the oppression of the Romans. But Jesus kept on doing the unexpected and because of that, people rather hold on to their expectations than believe the one who was right in front of them; Jesus the Son of God, who was proving himself by miracle after miracle!

Even his own disciples persisted in their expectations after he was resurrected. In Acts chapter 1, they asked, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

In our text today, chapter 13 of Matthew, Jesus teaches not about who he is, but about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus does this in parables and it will be apparent that the Kingdom of Heaven is not what they were expecting either.

OUR CONDITION

Expectations are hard to break. If we don't understand the Kingdom, we can grow discouraged in the gospel and find that we are seeking after the wrong things.

MAIN POINT

When we understand the nature of the Kingdom:

- We will be grateful that we have been shown the truth.
- We will not doubt the gospel when we see people fail.
- We will bear fruit and are willing to sacrifice everything for it.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Let's begin by reading in verse 1,

Matthew 13:1–10 (ESV)

¹ *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.*

³ *And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”*

¹⁰ *Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”*

The disciples asked Jesus a question; “Why do you speak to them in parables?” Jesus gives a long answer that we will look at in a minute but first, what is a parable?

The word parable comes from two words in Greek: Para and Ballo. Para means “alongside” of something. And Ballo means to throw or place something, or to lay something down. So, together to “place alongside of” for the sake of comparison. One thing next to another.

Later Jesus will say, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Now if Jesus did not make a comparison and merely said, “The mustard seed is the smallest of seeds, but grows larger than all the garden plants so that the birds can come and make nests in it,” then the disciples would say, “that is interesting Jesus, do you want to be a botanist?”

But no, He said, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that grows to the largest of plants so that the birds can come and nest in it.” The value is in the comparison.

And the value is there because it is Jesus telling them the comparison. If I wrote that parable, you might think, “that’s cool Dave, kinda poetic.” But it is Jesus who is telling them something, and he is the authority. He is telling them something that only God could know about. It is something that has never been revealed since the foundation of the world. The Kingdom of Heaven is like something... something that we could not know unless God revealed it.

When we understand the nature of the Kingdom, we will be grateful that we have been shown the truth.

And he continues in verse 11 where he explains why he is now using parables,

¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

Jesus is now talking to his disciples and not the crowds. He tells them that they are the audience that he has in mind; not the crowds. He continues in verse 12,

¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not

hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ *Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ““You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”* ¹⁵ *For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’*

This prophecy of Isaiah is from chapter 6 where Isaiah had just had a vision from the Lord. He was stunned and aware of his own unholiness. He was cleansed of his sin, and he “heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” And the message that God gave him was this judgment...

Isaiah 6:9-10

“Go, and say to this people:

“ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

Make the heart of this people dull,

and their ears heavy,

and blind their eyes;

lest they see with their eyes,

and hear with their ears,

and understand with their hearts,

and turn and be healed.”

The people of ancient Israel had not repented, time and time again, so that God’s disposition was no longer forgiveness but judgment. People need to understand that now, today, is the favorable day of the Lord. While you are alive you can experience God’s mercy and you must turn to Jesus now, because when you are dead it is too late.

God is also judging our nation. There are a greater and greater number of people with no faith and no church background. Most people do not even

believe in the idea that there is a “right” and a “wrong.” We don’t pursue virtue anymore. We don’t talk about truth or even “ethics” much less “morals.” Today we have “values” because that is a neutral term, you can have your values and I can have mine. Our nation is under judgment, and it is suffering and dying.

Jesus in chapter 11 had already pronounced woe on the people of Capernaum because they did not believe in him. Because they did not believe in him, how could they possibly understand what the Kingdom of Heaven was about? The Kingdom of Heaven is about a relationship with Jesus the King. If they would not believe in him, how could he teach them about the Kingdom of heaven? And so, Jesus spoke in parables. It is sort of like you need to understand addition before you can understand multiplication.

Jesus is doing the unexpected by not trying to gather the people to believe in him right then. This would later be the job of the disciples; to take the gospel to the world. Jesus is now focusing on his disciples. Verse 16,

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

In the previous chapter, Jesus said the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven was greater than John the Baptist, whom he described as the greatest person who ever lived. Why is this? Because the least in the Kingdom knows what all the prophets and even John the Baptist could not yet see; that Jesus was the redeemer come to save mankind by dying on a cross; and that he was resurrected, and he gives the Holy Spirit to all who would believe in him! That is the message that the prophets strained to see; they were given all sorts of mysterious prophecies, but now, we like

the disciples are the privileged ones that were allowed to see, that Jesus was the son of God, come to give his life as a ransom for many. We are greater than the greatest prophet because we know what was hidden since the foundation of the world!

When we understand the nature of the Kingdom, we will be grateful that we have been shown the truth.

So, how else is the Kingdom not what they expected?

First of all, that it was becoming clear that **membership** in the Kingdom was not simply because you were a Jew living in Israel. Jesus was not the sort of Messiah that would deliver their nation from Rome and bring a glorious earthly Kingdom.

Inclusion, or salvation, was not based on their nationality, but instead on faith in Jesus. This was new information for the disciples and they probably could not comprehend it fully yet. **The Kingdom membership was not what they expected.**

In verses 18-23, Jesus explains the parable of the soils. He describes three types of people that fail to believe while only one produces fruit. Again, membership in the Kingdom is not based upon nationality, but on genuine faith in him.

In verse 24, Jesus gives another parable, called the wheat and the tares.

²⁴ He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, ²⁵ but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. ²⁷ And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An

enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’²⁹ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.’³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.””

The weeds are called tares which looked just like wheat until it ripened and made its grain and was not edible.

Jesus explains something new again. **The perfect Kingdom of Heaven was not coming immediately.** It will be affected by Satan’s work in the meantime. Within the Church, the Kingdom of God on Earth, there will be believers and non-believers: wheat and tares. The end of times, the final judgment was not coming immediately. So, it was becoming clear that God had a longer plan and will not sort out the good from the evil until a final judgment day sometime in the future.

There are other conclusions that might have needed to take some time to soak in for the disciples. Many times, you hear someone that says, “I don’t go to church because there are too many hypocrites!” Yes, that is what Jesus is saying, that within the church, there will be real believers and false believers. Show them these verses; Jesus says that there will be believers and unbelievers in the church. Just because there are hypocrites in the church, it is not an option for Christians not to be in fellowship in a church. That is not God’s will, and if you don’t know that, then we need to ask ourselves, “am I even following God?” “What sort of soil am I?”

The great early Christian theologian Augustine said that the church is made up of the “visible church” and the “invisible church.” The visible church is what we see every time the church gathers. There will be some whose seed has fallen on hard soil and the birds are coming. Others will have had their seed fall in with the rocky ground and appear to follow

Christ but fall away. Then there are some whose seed will be choked out by the cares of the world.

We can see the person, but we can't see what sort of soil they are in. That is the "visible" church. The invisible church is only what God can see, those that truly are saved and will be in heaven with him.

We have had many people in this church that come and stay for a while and then go away. It's true in every church. People come, maybe even play on the worship team, then they are gone; and we are "ghosted" by them. Others might say, "we are looking for something else." Then you find that they are not even attending church anywhere.

That can seem unsettling to a believer; we think, "Am I one of those that falls away?" We should have some of that concern, but we are told to look at the fruit that will come out of our lives. It will reveal what sort of person we are. We are going to talk more about that in a minute.

John the apostle understands this when he says,

1 John 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

So how do these parables help us?

When we understand the nature of the Kingdom, we will not doubt the gospel when we see people fail.

Our faith is not in people, but in Christ. People in the church will fail. Failure does not prove that they are not in the Kingdom, but when they fall away from being part of any body or say that they, "I tried that once" or

are moving on to some other religion, it seems apparent that they were not really “of us.”

We watched a short video a couple of months back where some Gen-Z students were interviewed about their impression of “The Chosen” TV series. One young woman shared about how she was sexually abused by an elder in the church; it devastated her. If anyone could have grounds to judge the Gospel, it would be her, but not before God. “The Chosen’s” depiction of Christ renewed her faith in Christ despite what that man had done to her. She could understand that Satan has sown evil and bad seed in the church, where Christ has planted good seed. We should not question the Gospel, but the evil persons that we sometimes find in the church.

Jesus told some more parables about the nature of the Kingdom of heaven, verse 31,

³¹ *He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”*

³³ *He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”*

³⁴ *All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”*

Jesus is telling them things hidden since the foundation of the world about the Gospel and the Kingdom! So, he compares the Kingdom to a mustard plant with birds in it, and to a woman that leavens some dough. Strange.

We see that that Kingdom can grow exponentially from the smallest beginning. From a single believer, God can bring great things!

I was reading a commentary from James Boice this week that was intriguing. He said that based on the context, perhaps we ought to see in these parables like the four soils, or the wheat and the tares, the idea of evil being introduced into the church; he makes some good points. He says that the birds may represent evil infiltrating the church again (in this case the mustard plant). Evil coming and making a nest in the church. We certainly have plenty of examples of evil nesting in churches! He says the birds are depicted as evil in the previous example of taking away the seed from a person's heart.

The woman with the leaven likewise is a depiction of evil being introduced into the church. Leaven is frequently used as an illustration of evil in the Bible. So, it makes sense what he is saying. These parables, rather than merely being about the explosive growth potential of the gospel, are like the others, being about evil in the church too.

Jesus shares more parables in verse 44,

⁴⁴ *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."*⁴⁵

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

⁴⁷ *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind."⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad.*

⁴⁹ *So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

We don't like to hear about weeping and gnashing of teeth, but Jesus talks about it. There will be final judgment and God will separate the good from the bad.

We all know by hearing the gospel week after week that we are not saved by our own good works. That is an insult to God and Jesus' death on the cross to even think we could be good-enough for God. But our works are expected. If we have been given new life and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, then there ought to be good works. God created each believer for good works.

Ephesians 2:8–10 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Philippians 2:12–13 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

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There are a couple of positive parables here that show how much the Kingdom of God is worth. People go and sell all that they have to get it. God expects to see that sort of excitement in us. It is worth everything!

The chapter ends again with Jesus being rejected, verse 53,

⁵³ *And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, ⁵⁴ and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"*

⁵⁷ *And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." ⁵⁸ And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.*

Jesus was not the Messiah they expected and his teachings about the Kingdom were not as they expected either.

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

The disciples learned many things about the Kingdom that they did not expect. They learned that God's plan was longer and more complex than they knew about.

- For one thing it included the Gentiles – not just the Jews. We can be grateful for that!
- It included the establishment of the Church or gathering of God's people (Jews and Gentiles) in one body.
- Inclusion in the Kingdom was going to be by faith in Christ and made up of people with a new heart, born again and renewed in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah 31
- Membership was not just Jewish people that lived and looked forward to a new political Kingdom led by the Messiah on earth.
- But they also learned that Satan would be working too. There would be good seed and bad within the body of the church and they should not be discouraged with the gospel.

- They learned that they were privileged to know things hidden since the foundation of the earth. We are too!
- They learned that God cared about the fruit they would bear. It was Jesus' will that they bear much fruit and glorify God.

These things were not immediately clear to the disciples though they had been taught. They had to live through God's plan.

They had to experience Jesus' death and crucifixion and resurrection before they could understand their role in the whole thing – to take the gospel to the world and have their part in building the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Each one of us should be overwhelmed with gratitude that God has chosen us to know what has been hidden from the foundation of the earth and see that we have a part; just like the disciples in bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to the earth.

Please pray with me!