
For months now, we've been studying Matthew's gospel...an account of the Good News that was brought to the earth by Jesus Christ, the Son of the Only God...the Living God. Good news that sinners could be reconciled and we could be brought back to God. A God that is just, righteous, magnificent, and holy.

This morning, before we continue in our series and begin to look at Matthew chapter 13 and ultimately dive into “Why Jesus Preached in Parables,” I want to remind us who Jesus is, and why He came to this earth and why we're even here today.

As a pastor, it's my job, my calling and my burden to gladly, soberly and humbly preach and teach from this pulpit the truths of God's word each Sunday and Wednesday. It is my honor to do so. However, in that calling and in the process of week-to-week, month-to-month and now into 11 years of doing so; over time, the old saying can become true that familiarity breeds contempt. Translated: we get used to the routine and the ordinary pattern of what we do here week after week. In other words, it's ho-hum and hum-drum...it's Sunday...we get up...we go to church...we sing...we give some money...we worship God...we hear a message...and then walk out these metal doors and return to our lives the same we came in. In essence we've done this long enough that whether we realize or not, we can come here week after week and month and month and year and after and totally miss God.

I pray you will hear my heart this morning. As I have tried to teach and preach from this wonderful book...I have sought to relay to us the powerful, captivating grandeur of the astounding fact that God sent His only Son to die on a cross for us. We know this to be true, but we're so used to the facts, we can blow right past God.

Dear church family, I want to ask you to listen for the next few minutes...maybe like you've not listened in a long time. I pray you will listen because what I'm going to share with you is from God. I know that as sure as I'm standing here, God has squeezed my life with a fresh understanding of His presence and I desperately do NOT want you to miss God this morning out of routine. For you see, I believe for many of us...we are indeed missing and neglecting God. Sadly, I'm afraid, we are much like the first century people in Israel who had Jesus walking and talking right in front of them...but, they missed Him. My kids asked Thursday at supper, dad are you sick? I said, “No, I'm just tired.” I had been working on this message all day and it was taking it out of me. I was thinking of us.

Oh, church family, will we yet again... miss God today? God...our Good Good Father...who is holy and righteous and so powerful that He said, “Let there be light and there was light.” God who is so holy and pure that Isaiah fell to his face in His presence and said, “Woe is me...I'm a man of unclean lips.” God who is so powerful and awesome, that Moses begged to see His face, but God knew that would kill Moses, so God hid Moses in the crack of huge rock and let him get a glimpse from behind of His essence...and Moses rejoiced in just seeing the back side of God.

God, the One whom we are to reverence and come to with a respect that leads to be obedience. God, who said to Job:

“Gird your loins like a man and I will question and you will make known to me, says the

Lord God Almighty. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place? Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you. Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.

Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness? Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail that falls from my sky? Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt? Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?

From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the frost of heaven? The waters become hard like stone. Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth? Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, that they may flash forth, but only go so far as I say? Have you an arm like me and can you thunder with a voice like mine? Hide your face in the dust of the ground, for I am God.”

Oh church, have we forgotten that is God and that is His power! His majesty? His supreme greatness that's above all and over all of everything that's ever been created or known! God...the one who is so holy and righteous that it was His holiness that required the death of His Son to satisfy His holiness.

Church family, do we really know God anymore? Has there been a death of who God really is in our minds and hearts today? Have we become so used to the routine that we don't even recognize His presence anymore? Could that happen here? Could it happen to you? Is it happening to you?

Oh ponder with me Church... Who is this God that would call it Good News to sacrifice His Son on a cross? Who is this God who would lay the sin of the world on His Son's sinless back? Do you know this God? You see I have a great fear for us today. I fear that so many don't really know God. And I fear that I've done a poor job teaching you about the God of the Bible.

Listen, I said the God of the Bible. Why? Because I'm afraid we know very little of this God anymore. Instead, we have made up a god in our minds and our imaginations that suit us. We've made god that's like a cosmic Grandpa floating on a cloud, who exists to meet all of our needs and is nothing more than our spiritual lapdog, who is at our beck and call when we snap our fingers with another demand. Oh, how we have made such an error! An error like those who lived prior to the year 1500. For prior to the year 1500, humankind thought everything in the universe revolved around the earth, that is...until Copernicus showed them that the earth revolved around the sun.

Church, we need a Copernican revolution! We've made worship and the Christian life about us. We have said to God: You meet my needs. You revolve around me! You make my life better. You solve all my problems... You...you...you... do....do...do...what I tell you God. And if He doesn't, we sulk like spoiled children whose been told no at the checkout line. And thus, we've made god that's nothing more than a spiritual butler. A servant to our wishes, because we believe everything revolves around us and our happiness! But, that dear friend, is not who God is at all! That is not the God of the Bible! Yes, we need a Copernican revolution and realize that God doesn't revolve around us...NO WAY! We are to revolve around Him. We are to fall on our knees and honor Him in reverence for Who He is... because He is God!!!

I believe there has been a death of knowing God in America. Why? Indeed we've made God all about us! Think about it! Our churches and our sermons, our songs, our Bible Studies...they've become all about us. You see, most Christians have a view of God that costs them nothing at all. No...God must pay the cost...not us! God must give to us! Not us to Him! You take care of me God! You take care of my needs God and then I MIGHT give you some half-hearted obedience in return! You please me first God and then I'll think about taking up my cross, denying myself and following you. And you now what? People who live like this have nothing more than a "hear-say" knowledge of God, and most have never experienced God at all.

Listen to me, please...can you grasp JUST how powerful and magnanimous God really is? Can you try to fathom the depths of His universe? If you could take a ride in a jet that moved at light speed, you would barely be halfway across God's universe in a million years. Do you realize how great God is? Do you know this God?

You see, that's why Jesus came. He said as He sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God." What is eternal life? Knowing God! Did you hear that! Eternal life is knowing God and the reason heaven is a place of ETERNITY is because it will take that long to truly grasp all that God is...because Heaven is so much more than just a place with streets of gold...heaven is knowing God and it will take all of eternity to begin to even grasp all that He is.

The most important thing that can ever enter the human mind are thoughts about God. And so...to determine if we really know God, we must ask these questions:

- "Have I truly been confronted with the God of the Bible or just the God of my own imagination?
 - Have I made an idol by making up and worshipping the god that I want?
 - ...the God who will meet my needs and comfort my hurts...and do what I ask...but, ME?...live for Him...in righteousness and holiness?
 - No! My god doesn't expect that?
 - After all, no one's perfect. My god understands me and the way I am.
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Folks...those are lies from the pit of Hell. That's not God you are worshipping that's an idol of your own making. Because the Biblical God sacrificed His Son so that we might be called the Sons and Daughters of God and in gratitude and thanksgiving THEN...to seek to live in holiness before this holy God...the Biblical God who sees us right now from heaven.

So can we be honest this morning? Do you seek God just for the blessings or do you seek God because you really want to know Him...even if that means suffering or pain or silence? Oh church family, today in our "pagan-anything goes" culture, there has been a death of knowing God...the true God...but, may that not be so here! May we know the One true God...may we truly see Him for Who He Is. For there is nothing greater that you and I can do with our lives than to seek God and to pursue Him with all we've got. And so, Church, that's why we were singing the song "Strong God" a little while ago...

**There is none higher, no...there is none greater, no...
There is none stronger than our God**

Sing out, lift your voice and cry out
Awesome is our strong God
Mighty is our God

Do you see the difference in how you see and hear those words now? You sang them 15 minutes ago out of routine, perhaps out of rote memory...but, did you really sing them to God?

You see, I can preach to you another message today and we can all just go through the motions, but if we don't see God and we miss Him...what have we accomplished? NOTHING!

You want to know the truth? Most of the time when I've been preaching lately, I've found that I've only been dealing with the symptoms and not the root cause of our problems. Church, it's been revealed to me by God's Holy Spirit, that I've been addressing what I'll call "the low hanging fruit of our lives." But, that's only putting bandaids on that which needs major surgery. We need to go beyond the fruit to the roots. We need to go below the baked soil of our lives and go down...down to the roots...the truth of who we are. For you see, it's when we get to the roots of who we are and what we really believe about God that we'll see WHY we're living the way we are.

It's when we go down to the roots that we'll truly see if we have a Biblical understanding of God or if we've made a graven image of the god we want to suit our lifestyles. It's when we go to the roots that we'll see why we live the way we do. We'll see why we can name the name of God and yet treat Him with such contempt by how we treat our family members, by how we treat people who make us mad, by how we treat our children, our spouses, our co-workers. We'll see why we tweet what we tweet, why we post, what we post... why we drink what we drink, why we watch what we watch, and why we sleep with who we sleep with. We'll see the truth if we can get to the roots.

Can you feel it? Do you feel what I'm feeling? Do you sense something unusual this morning?

You know what?...I believe we are! I believe He's here! Right now! And you know what else, I believe He's taken us underground...breaking up the dirt of our baked hearts and He's taken us down to the roots! **And that's what I've prayed for!!** That's what I've begged the God to do today.

It's what I told the Deacons Wednesday night that I desperately desired. I so desperately want us to get past the ordinary, superficial worship of the god we've made up in our minds and truly see God for who He is. That we might sit in awe and truly be astounded and speechless in His presence...as we sit in the presence of THE Almighty God of the universe! The God who loved us so much that He sent His Son to this earth to deliver to us from sin and to bring us the good news. The good news that through Jesus we might know this Almighty God as our Father.

AND that's why we're here! And that's why we sing...and that's why I preach from this Bible... because it's in the pages of this book that we learn who God really is. And that's what we're going to do with the rest of our time this morning. We're going to learn about God through His Son, Jesus Christ by way of Matthew's gospel and how Jesus revealed Himself and His Father's kingdom by preaching in parables.

This will only be an introduction to the 7 parables that Jesus told about the kingdom of God...scholars call these the: "The Kingdom Parables." And we'll look at the first one next week. But, in the next few minutes we have left, I want you to understand why Jesus taught in parables.

Matthew 13:1-3

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.

Matthew 13:10-17

10 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in 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. **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.’ **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.

Matthew 13:34-35

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.”

Tonight, there's a little football game that's going to be played in Houston. Have you heard of it? It's the Superbowl. Superbowl 51 to be exact...



...It'll be between the New England Patriots and the Atlanta Falcons. Now in that game tonight, these two quarterbacks...



Tom Brady and Matt Ryan will step up to the line of scrimmage and they will survey the defense and see if they can move the ball against that set...if they don't think they can...they they will do something at the line of scrimmage... What's Tom Brady doing?



He's calling audible? What is that? It's like a parable. He's calling numbers or names...like Peyton's Manning's famous: “Omaha, Omaha” and even though the other team hears what he's saying, they don't understand it. But, do the Patriots? Do they understand it?

Sure they do. Why? Because they've been taught what the audible means and that's what a parable is. It's something that you've got to be on the team to understand. It makes no sense to anyone else.

In fact those on the other team...well, the more they try to figure out the audible, the less they understand it. Just when they think they've broken the code, the other team runs something they never expected and their left scratching their heads. And that's a perfect analogy of the parables Jesus told. His followers got it, but those who rejected Him didn't. Nor would they ever get it.

You see a parable, as Matthew Henry says, "is a shell that keeps good fruit for the diligent, but keeps it from the lazy." The word in the Greek: *Parabolē*. Means *to come alongside*. It literally means to make a comparison by way of an illustration. Why did Jesus use them? Well, we all learn by stories. We love stories. That's why we love movies like Star Wars and Lord of the Rings and books like "The Chronicles of Narnia." We love stories to illustrate greater truths. Parables, then, are earthly stories that have heavenly meanings...sacred secrets...audibles...only known to those on the team.

You see, Jesus had blasted the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and so they left, therefore, Jesus got into a boat at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee... See the artist's depiction...



Why? Because He needed an arena, but He didn't have one. No stadiums in Jesus' day in Galilee, so He got into a boat, which served as His pulpit, and the hillside running down to the beach, served as an amphitheater and so, the people gathered on the seashore where they desired to learn the audibles... the parables about the kingdom of God.

Those who wanted to learn, stayed. Those who didn't, like the Pharisees, left. It's really simple: All who gathered on that seashore 2000 year ago wanted to know the truth. They desired to know the truth and they were willing to listen. They were willing to follow Jesus. So, they stopped what they were doing. They left their fields and their jobs and they said (by their presence), "I WANT TO KNOW! I WANT TO LEARN! TEACH ME! SHOW ME THE TRUTH!" And that's what Jesus would do. He would teach those who chose to follow Him in truth. What was the truth...that they might know God...His Father.

And so we now return to where we began... This life is about knowing God...the Only God. Do you know Him? Are you on His team today? Really? Truly? Look at fruit of your life and then ask yourself...what does my fruit reveal about my roots? Do I really know the God of the Bible or I'm I fumbling around like someone who doesn't understand the plays?

You see, we've got a playbook and we've got to follow the plays written by God... And if we don't follow those plays...the ball is going to be passed our way and it's going to hit us in the back of the helmet and we're going to turn around and complain to the quarterback and say, "Why did you throw it so soon." And he's reply... "Didn't you listen to the audible? You ran the wrong pattern...you did you what you wanted to do, because you didn't value what the Coach put in the playbook."

Unfortunately, that's what so many Christians are doing today...running their own patterns...doing it their way...running their own plays and wondering why they never make any progress toward the goal line.

Oh hear the Word of God today. May these words I read to you from His playbook get down to the roots of your soul. May these words break up the fallow, hardened and crusted heart! Isaiah, who stood before the Almighty God and saw himself in the light of God's holiness and said, "Woe is me...I'm a man of unclean lips" gives us this counsel... See the screens... Here's the play...are you ready...

Isaiah 55:6-13

6 "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; **7** let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. **8** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. **9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. **10** "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11** so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. **12** "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. **13** Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Oh church...that's the Word of God...that's been given to us...revealing Him as the One and only God...the magnificent, majestic God, the one who wants you to know Him as your Good Good Father. The one who deserves to be worshipped, served and obeyed.
