

Session 12 Seven Parables of the Kingdom (Mt. 13)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In this session, we will look at seven parables about the kingdom of God that Jesus taught by the Sea of Galilee, autumn AD 28 (Mt. 13:1-52; Mk. 4:1-34; Lk. 8:4-18).
- B. The religious leaders in Israel had publicly declared their animosity toward Jesus. Because of their rejection of Him, Jesus began to teach in parables that concealed new truths about the kingdom from those whose hearts were hardened against God.
- C. Matthew 13 contains seven parables about the kingdom—the first four were spoken to the crowds and the last three only to the disciples. Jesus spoke in parables both to *reveal and conceal* truth. That is, to make truth easier to understand for those who are receptive to Him and to hide truth from those who harden their hearts against Him.

II. THE DANIEL 2 BACKDROP TO MATTHEW 13

- A. Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream about a statue that represented four Gentile kingdoms that would arise—Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (Daniel 2).
³¹“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image [Gentile kingdoms] ...³⁴ You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image... ³⁵Then [they] ...were crushed ...so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth... ⁴⁴the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed and...it shall break in pieces...all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.” (Dan. 2:31-44)
 - 1. The “stone cut without hands” spoke of the kingdom of God being manifested on earth. The stone struck and completely destroyed the statue (the oppressive Gentile kingdoms), and then the little stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:34-35).
 - 2. Daniel 2:34-35 pictured a single cataclysmic event which ushered in God's kingdom with power—as a stone that struck and shattered the oppressive governments. Thus, Israel was looking for Messiah who would totally remove all the opposing evil kingdoms on the earth.
- B. John the Baptist spoke on this Daniel 2 theme of the kingdom of God coming to earth (Mt. 3:2-12). The Roman Empire was the fourth kingdom described in Daniel 2, so people assumed that John was proclaiming the time that God would overthrow Rome and establish His kingdom through Israel as He poured out His Spirit and judged the wicked like chaff burned by fire (Mt. 3:11-12). The destruction of Rome, the universal baptism of the Spirit, and the growth of the kingdom to fill the earth did not occur during Jesus' first coming as Daniel and John the Baptist implied.
¹In those days John the Baptist came preaching...²saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”...¹¹He who is coming after me...will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Mt. 3:1-12)

III. JESUS' PURPOSE FOR SPEAKING IN PARABLES (MT. 13:10-17)

- A. Jesus explained why He taught with parables (13:10-17)—both to reveal *and* to conceal truth. By hiding truth from those who hardened their hearts against Him, Jesus showed them grace in saving them from the added guilt of rejecting more truth and emboldening them to act against Him.
- ¹⁰*And the disciples...said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"* ¹¹*He answered..., "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.* ¹²*For whoever has, to him more will be given...but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.* ¹³*Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (Mt. 13:10-13)*
- B. **Mysteries of the kingdom:** These parables revealed the mysteries of how the kingdom is manifested in this age. A "mystery" in the Scripture speaks of truths not revealed in the Old Testament and only revealed in the New Testament. Paul defined a mystery as that "which has been hidden but now is revealed" to God's people (Col. 1:26). It is not a truth difficult to understand, but a truth that can be understood only by divine revelation in the New Testament.
- ²⁶*...the mystery which has been hidden from ages...but now has been revealed to His saints."* (Col. 1:26)
- C. **Seeing they do not see:** Many who "saw and heard physically" did not "see and hear spiritually." The understanding that a person "has" or "does not have" is related to their receptivity. Jesus emphasized that truth is not neutral; it hardens or softens those who are exposed to it.
- D. Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom had come, yet it came in an unexpected and hidden form that did not overwhelm the present order of life. It grows only as people respond in faith and obedience. Israel expected a cataclysmic event like what will happen when Jesus returns. However, Jesus' message was that, though small, the kingdom promised in Daniel 2 is here in its early stage.
- E. Jesus conveyed four aspects of "the mystery," or four new truths, in the seven parables (Mt. 13). He taught that *in this age* obedience to the kingdom will be voluntary and not enforced; second, that the kingdom will start very small, yet it will eventually fill the whole earth; third, its great value will be hidden to many; and finally, that God will separate the wicked from the righteous by His judgments at the end of the age. The mystery is that *the kingdom would be revealed in stages*.
- F. The earthly reign of Messiah on the throne of David was clearly revealed by the Old Testament prophets, so it was not a mystery. But in Matthew 13, Jesus introduced the spiritual reign of the kingdom which would increase progressively in the period between His first and second coming. His judgments would be manifested first against Satan's kingdom, not Rome or human institutions.
- G. Jesus first emphasized spiritual victory empowering His people to enjoy relationship with Him and walk in love, humility, and purity.
- H. God will release the greatest revival in the Church in the midst of the greatest, escalating darkness.
- ²*Behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. (Isa. 60:2)*

IV. THE SETTING AND SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

- A. The setting in which Jesus taught the parables of the kingdom (Mt. 13:1-3; Mk. 4:1-2; Lk. 8:4): A great crowd by the Sea of Galilee forced Jesus to speak from a boat (Mk. 3:9; Lk. 5:3).
¹On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. ²And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. ³Then He spoke many things to them in parables... (Mt. 13:1-3)
- B. Parables one (the four soils) and two (the wheat and the tares) teach that kingdom obedience is not forced. The parable of the sower speaks of very different responses to the message of the kingdom.
- C. Parables three (mustard seed) and four (leaven) teach that the kingdom starts small and grows large. The leavening process highlights the internal and invisible dynamic of its global growth.
- D. Parables five (treasure) and six (pearl) teach that the kingdom's value is not seen by most people.
- E. Parable seven (dragnet) teaches that the removal of the wicked will occur at the end of the age. The parable of the tares (parable two) also teaches this.

V. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE FOUR TYPES OF SOIL (MT. 13:3-9, 18-23)

- A. The parable of the sower and the seed was spoken to the crowd (Mt. 13:3-9; Mk. 4:3-9; Lk. 8:5-8). It described how the crowds responded to His teaching by illustrating the four types of responses people make to the preaching of God's reign. These four types of soil were familiar to farmers who scattered seeds as they walked through their fields. Jesus interpreted this parable in Mt. 13:18-23.
³"...Behold, a sower went out to sow...⁴some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵Some fell on stony places...and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶But...because they had no root they withered away. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns...choked them. ⁸But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Mt. 13:1-8)
1. **Wayside:** Some seeds fell on the path where birds ate them before they germinated (13:4).
 2. **Stony places:** Seed that falls on stony ground may grow quickly in the shallow topsoil, but because it does not have deep roots to obtain the necessary moisture, it dies (13:5-6)
 3. **Thorns:** Seed that falls among the thorns will eventually be choked by the thorn bushes that squeeze out the young plant, robbing it of necessary light and nourishment, so it dies (13:7).
 4. **Good ground:** Some seed fell on good ground and produced a crop.
- B. In each case, the seed is the same, but the difference is in the receptivity of the soil or the heart response of each person who heard the message of the kingdom. The mystery is that the kingdom is here, but it currently does not have the irresistible power Daniel 2 described where it destroys wicked governments.

VI. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (MT. 13:18-23)

- A. Jesus explained the parable of the sower and seed (Mt. 13:18-23; Mk. 4:13-20; Lk. 8:11-15). The seed is the Word of God which fell on four types of soil, speaking of the responses to the Word.
- ¹⁹*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one ...snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.*
- ²⁰*But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²²Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (Mt. 13:19-23)*
1. **Wayside:** Some seeds fell on the hard path where birds ate them quickly (13:4).
 2. **Stony places:** Seed that fell on stony ground (13:5-6) immediately sprouted with an initial joyful response. This convert fell away, showing his response was not deep or genuine.
 3. **Thorns:** Seed that fell among the thorns ultimately were choked out (13:7) by cares or anxiety of this world and the seduction of riches, and produced no fruit.
 4. **Good ground:** The seed that fell on good ground produced an extraordinary crop. A tenfold yield was considered good. Genuine believers seek to obey the Word and thus become spiritually **fruitful**, though the measure of fruitfulness varies. Jesus commended all who received the message *regardless* of their measure of productivity.
- B. Two groups made a profession of faith that later proved superficial. They began well, but failed to continue to follow the Lord. Whether they are saved or lost is not the point emphasized in this parable. What matters most is not a person's profession of faith, but their perseverance in faith.
- C. Summary:
1. The first type heard the Word of God, but the devil stole it.
 2. The second heard the Word of God, but only had a shallow response to it.
 3. The third type heard the Word of God, but thorns of worldliness choked the life of that seed.
 4. The fourth type heard the Word of God and had varying degrees of fruitfulness.
- D. The next six parables that follow elaborate on this first parable by showing us other pictures of other aspects of the arrival and growth of the kingdom of God.
1. The parable of the wheat and tares explains hypocrites and heretics in the Church.
 2. The third and fourth parables (mustard seed and leaven) show how the kingdom advances.
 3. The fifth and sixth (treasure and pearl) show the great value and worthiness of the kingdom.
 4. The seventh (dragnet) reinforces the truth of the parable of the wheat and tares, showing the importance of that truth so that we are neither deceived nor offended.

VII. THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES (MT. 13:24-30)

- A. Many wonder why victory is not seen more clearly if the kingdom has arrived already? If Jesus is Messiah, why do so few receive His leadership? In the first parable, the sower used the same seed. Here we see two different kinds of seed being sown by two men—a farmer and his enemy.
- ²⁴“...The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares [weeds] among the wheat...²⁶ When the grain...produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ²⁷So the servants of the owner...said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ ²⁸He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ ²⁹But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰Let both grow together until the harvest, and...I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’” (Mt. 13:24-30)*
- B. This parable addresses the delay of judgment—this was one of the most difficult aspects of Jesus’ teaching. God’s people are not to separate the wheat from the tares because this will be delayed until the end-of-the-age harvest. Thus, Jesus did not destroy the wicked Roman oppressors.
- C. Jesus Himself gave the interpretation of this parable (13:36-43) teaching that judgment will be delayed until the end of the age
- ³⁷“...he who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. ³⁹The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels...⁴¹The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴²and will cast them into the furnace of fire. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father! (Mt. 13:37-43)*
1. The good seed represents believers in Jesus, while the tares are sons of Satan (Jn. 8:44). The devil is the enemy; the harvest is the end of the age (Joel 3:13). The harvesters are angels (Mt. 24:30-31; 25:31). The field is the world, indicating a global mission beyond Israel.
 2. God will permit the righteous and wicked to coexist in this age, but He will separate the wicked and judge them, while gathering the righteous to be rewarded in His presence forever.
 3. The problem is in the tares being closely intermingled with the wheat—the wheat could get pulled up with the tares. In this present age, there is a mixture of good and bad people. This can confuse some, especially when the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.
- D. Jesus was not commanding that we avoid confronting sin in the church (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5).
- E. This parable describes an order of events at His return (Mt. 24:37-41; Lk 17:26-37). Jesus will come with angels to execute the final judgment of the righteous and the wicked (Mt.16:27; 25:31-33).
- F. The righteous will be rewarded by shining like the sun (Dan. 12:3).

VIII. THE PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN (MT. 13:31-33)

- A. Jesus compared the kingdom to a mustard seed and to a lump of yeast—the kingdom will grow from an **insignificant beginning** to great size (mustard seed) with vast influence (leaven). The manifestation of God’s reign started with Jesus’ small group of uneducated disciples.
- B. The parable of the mustard seed (Mt. 13:31-32; Mk. 4:30-32; Lk. 13:18-19) highlights the unforeseen character of kingdom as starting much smaller than most thought and then growing gradually instead of coming in one cataclysmic event. The work of the kingdom can be dismissed.
- ³¹“...*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,*
³²*which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.” (Mt. 13:31-32)*
- C. The parable of the leaven or yeast hidden in meal [bread dough] (Mt. 13:33; Lk 13:20-21) communicates a similar message as that of the mustard seed, emphasizing the initial smallness and unimpressiveness of the kingdom compared to what it eventually becomes. Jesus compared the growing of kingdom to the invisible and imperceptible impact of **leaven** in a lump of dough. We can be confident that regardless of any opinions, the kingdom has a glorious future.
- ³³“...*The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.*” (Mt. 13:33)

IX. THE PARABLES OF THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL (MT. 13:44-46)

- A. These parables highlight the value of the kingdom and the fact that its value is hidden to many. The kingdom is so valuable that it is worth sacrificing anything for our participation in it. The problem is that its value is hidden. It is not obvious to everybody now, but it will be shortly.
- ⁴⁴“*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶*who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” (Mt. 13:44-46)***
- B. The treasure and the pearl can speak either of the kingdom or of Jesus, the King of the kingdom.

X. THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET (MT. 13:47-50)

- A. The kingdom is like a dragnet that gathered both that which was good and bad.
- ⁴⁷“*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸*which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and...gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will...separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰*and cast them into the furnace of fire...*” (Mt. 13:47-50)**
- B. This teaches us that many who profess to be a Christian and who associate with the kingdom are not all genuine believers. Both good and evil will continue until the end when both are evaluated according to their true character. The Lord will remove the wicked in His timing.