

The Parables of Jesus
The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like...
 Matthew 13

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
 And every common bush afire with God:
 But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
 The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries....*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's, *Aurora Leigh*

Context:

After preaching the arrival of God's Kingdom in his coming as the Messiah, Jesus denounces the towns that rejected him (**Matthew 11:20-24**).

Jesus thanks his Father in heaven that the Gospel of the Kingdom is hidden from the powerful and learned and revealed to the lowly and babes (**Matthew 11:25-30**).

From prison, even John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner, had some doubts (**Mat 11:3ff**).

The religious leaders, who wanted a Warrior Messiah, not a Prince of Peace, hated Jesus and accused him of doing all these signs by the power of the devil. (**Mat 12:22-32**).

They insisted that Jesus give them a sign from heaven, but Jesus only gives them the sign of Jonah, which, primarily, is not a sign at all. Rather, it is a testament to the Spirit's work in the human heart to believe the Word of God, as seen in the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba.

Only secondarily is Jonah a sign—soon to be realized in the death and resurrection of Christ, as Jonah was in the belly of the sea creature three days and nights. But more than the religious leaders rejected Jesus—the fickle crowds who loved all the excitement and bennies of Jesus' loving miracles, walked away from Jesus, when he exposed what was really in their hearts and called them out for their sin.

With that context, we come to **Matthew 13** and a series of parables Jesus told about the mystery of the Kingdom of heaven, that is, God's heavenly rule on earth in the coming of Jesus.

vv. 3-23 Jesus tells and explains the Parable of the Sower.

Although the sower in this parable remains anonymous, the Sower in the next parable is the Son of Man—Jesus' favorite title for himself. So, it's safe to say that, primarily, the Sower is Jesus, but the intentional anonymity suggests that Jesus is saying the sower could be anyone who scatters the seeds of Kingdom Gospel.

vv. 3-9 Jesus identifies four kinds of soil—four heart-conditions—on which the seeds of the Gospel fall.

vv. 18-23 Jesus explains the parable to his disciples.

The first soil – roadside

The next two soils - rocky and thorny

The fourth soil – good, bearing fruit

Although Luke's Gospel account seems to indicate that the rocky and thorny soils *could* represent unfaithful or immature believers, Matthew seems to indicate that, on the whole, they represent those whose belief in Jesus is shallow and self-indulgent, and eventually proves to be false. But if not, the most we can say about them is this: *God only knows if they are saved*.

Jesus does not give us the option to accept him as Savior but not submit to him as Lord

Jesus said that salvation is more than a gate we enter; it's a path we follow after entering the gate—a path he described as difficult, requiring great effort on our part to partner with God's Spirit in the process of our spiritual maturity and in bearing spiritual fruit for God's glory (e.g., **Romans 12:1ff**; **Ephesians 4:1ff**; **2 Peter 1:3ff**).

God's saving grace in justifying and regenerating us is free, but as Detrick Bonhoeffer said it so well, "*Grace is free, but it's not cheap.*"

Hebrews 12: As God's children, our Father in heaven will discipline us toward maturity in Christ—**guaranteed!**

Hebrews 12 is equally clear, if God does not discipline us, we have no basis to claim that we are his children—none!

It is inconceivable that a person, who places their personal trust in the risen Christ and receives, as a gift of grace through faith, a right standing before holy God, and, what is more, is spiritually regenerated by God, and the empowering presence of the Spirit of God comes to dwell within that person forever, and creates in that person a new, righteous heart patterned after God's own holiness, that that person's life does not change.

We are saved by grace through faith, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone could boast (**Ephesians 2:8-9**), but don't stop there! Read **v. 10. FOR...** (In other words, the whole reason God gives us salvation as a gift is so we can get to work!) ...we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God ordained beforehand that we should walk in them.

All the great doctrines of grace about *the gate of salvation* in the first half of Paul's New Testament epistles are to get us the second half of his epistles, where *the path of salvation*, the application of all that grace in our daily lives, is laid out for us to follow and obey.

1 Corinthians 3 - Some will enter the Kingdom as by fire—their life's body of work will be completely consumed in judgment, because it was done for selfish gain and glory. They, themselves, will be saved, but they will have nothing to show for it. They will lose their heavenly reward.

1 John 2:28 They will shrink away from Jesus in shame.

2 Peter 1:11 They will not be richly welcomed into God's eternal Kingdom.

It's possible for a believer to enter the Kingdom naked and ashamed, but are you willing to bet your eternity on that? No wonder, Peter admonishes us in that very same passage to make every effort to add to our faith (v. 5) the character of Christ in order to make sure our election and calling (v. 10).

Jesus said this parable is the parable of all parables. **Mark 4:13** - If you don't get this parable, how will you get any of them?

Once Jesus clarified who belongs in the Kingdom, he beings the six remaining parables with, "*The Kingdom of heaven is like...*"

Jesus follows up the Parable of the Sower with the Parable of the Weeds in **vv. 24-30**.

In this parable, there are two very different sowers and two very different seeds. One sower is the Son of Man, i.e., Jesus, who sows wheat seed—true believers, true citizens of the Kingdom. The other sower is the devil who sows weeds, wolves in sheep's clothing, who may be very religious, but have no relationship with God.

Jesus is basically saying, that's the nature of the Kingdom at this time; it's a mixed bag of wheat and weeds, and we're not going to be able to weed out the bad, without destroying the good.

By its very nature the Kingdom of heaven, at this time, is only inaugurated, not consummated.

That's why, after the Parable of the Weeds, but before he explains its meaning to the disciples, Jesus inserts two mini-parables in **vv. 31-33**—The Mustard Seed and Yeast. These two short cameos underscore that God's Kingdom on earth, at this present time, is only inaugurated, not consummated.

Then Jesus goes on to interpret his weeds parable in **vv. 36-43**. When the Kingdom is consummated, when King Jesus returns with his angels, the wheat (true believers) will be separated from the weeds (false believers and God's enemies). The weeds will be cast into the fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The wheat, on the other hand, God's people, will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father—an image right out of **Daniel 12:3**.

Then, having revealed these ominous realities of God's Kingdom in the first four parables, Jesus shares two more mini-parables in **vv. 44-46**—The Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price. Both parables emphasize how God's Kingdom is worth giving up anything in this world to have (cf. **Philippians 3:8-11**).

Finally, in **vv. 47-50**, Jesus restates, with a seventh parable about a great fishing net, the warning he gave in the parable of the weeds.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SAVED?

INITIAL SALVATION: To stand righteous before God and be accepted into his Kingdom is a **gift of pure grace** he offers to all who place their personal trust in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus did everything for us to qualify us for his Kingdom. God the Son became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. Being fully human, Jesus lived a sinless life for us, fulfilling all righteousness required by God. Then, on the cross, Jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice for our sins, taking the judgment we all deserve from God.

The Bible says in **Acts 20:28** that the blood Jesus shed on the cross was not mere human blood; it was the blood of God. That means the efficacy of Jesus' blood is infinite in its power to remove sin's guilt and penalty from anyone who believes and receives him as Savior. Then, Jesus rose from the dead three days later as the great sign that his life and death were fully accepted by God on our behalf.

What is more, in initial salvation, God not only justifies believers (credits them with Christ's own righteousness), he also regenerates them, bringing their spirits back to life, permanently indwelling them with the Holy Spirit, and creating in them a new, righteous heart. In other words, God not only imputes Christ's righteousness to believing sinners, he also imparts Christ's righteousness in them, giving them the ability (with the Spirit's help) to grow in their personal righteous and progressively become more like Jesus.

ONGOING SALVATION: Then, as believers partner with God in growing up to maturity in Christ, they produce spiritual fruit—some 100-fold, some 60-fold, some 30-fold. This aspect of our salvation is not optional; it's crucial. It shows that a person is a true follower of Jesus. (**James**— Don't just tell me you believe; show me!)

FINAL SALVATION: Finally, when Jesus returns, God will perfect believers in Christ—body, soul, and spirit, and they will live forever in a New Creation.

What is more, Jesus will bring with him **his reward**, and he will grant it to those who were faithful stewards of all the grace he invested in us. Those he rewards will not only stand *accepted* by God, they will also stand *approved* by God to reign with Christ in his Kingdom forever.

Are we ready to stand before Jesus?

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.