

XLVL. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God
“An Overview and an Introduction”
Matthew 13
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April 19, 2015 – Morning Sermon

We will be in Matthew 13 for this study. This will be an overview of Matthew 13 and the Kingdom parables so the text I will to begin with will be lengthy. This is the Word of God and it's the truth. Matthew 13:1-52 says [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?” [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.

[18] “Hear then the parable of the sower: [19] When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. [20] As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21] yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. [22] As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. [23] As for what

was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

[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.’”

[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.”

[36] Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” [37] He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. [38] The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, [39] and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. [40] Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. [41] The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, [42] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [43] Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

[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 righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[51] *“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” [52] And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”* The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The Roman Numeral at the top of this page is a continuation of my preaching through the book of Matthew in my preaching ministry. I covered Matthew 1 to 4 and then took a break. Then at another time I covered the Kingdom Manifesto, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 to 7 and then took a break again. I then covered Matthew 8 through 10 and took a break. The reason I am in Matthew 13 and not doing Matthew 11 and 12 yet is I am lining up with our theme this year. This is the Kingdom of God and the Word of God. I will go back to Matthew 11 and 12 eventually.

Our theme for this year has to do with the supremacy and sufficiency of the Word of God. We just finished a study on what the Son of God says about the Word of God in the Gospels and we found that Jesus said seven things about the Word of God. First of all He tells us that it’s the Truth. Secondly, He says it is unbreakable. Thirdly, He says while it is designed to be preached it has been given to be read. Fourthly, it bears witness of Christ where the Old Testament points to Him and the New Testament expounds Him. Fifthly, it is Spirit and life. The flesh profits nothing for it the Spirit who gives life for My words are Spirit and life. It must be fulfilled in Christ and we also learned it is essential.

You can know the Word of God and not know the God of the Word but you cannot know the God of the Word without knowing the Word of God. It is essential. You can’t believe in Him without knowing the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of Christ. Furthermore we’re very much committed to being a mission church, sending the Gospel from Birmingham to the world but you can take the God of the Word to the world and not take the God of the Word but you cannot take the God of the Word to the world without taking the Word of God. We’re people of the Book. Christianity is not designed by man’s philosophy or reason. It is given to us by Divine revelation in His Word, that the Word of God is our final rule of faith and practice.

Now we’re turning to this matter of the Kingdom of God. We have seven Kingdom parables that Jesus taught and that’s why I’m going there for you can’t get into the Kingdom without the Word of God. You can’t distinguish it from its counterfeit that Satan puts in this world without the Word of God. You can’t value it so much that you would sell anything and everything for that Kingdom without the Word of God. You don’t know how to live in it without the Word of God. You don’t understand its essence and its future without the Word of God. So we are looking at the Kingdom of God and the Word of God.

In this study I’m just going to start this series by doing an overview of the parabolic ministry of Jesus. I’m going to do this in threes. I will give you three things about parables. Then three things about the parables of Jesus and then I will give you three things about the seven Kingdom parables that we will be studying in this series. Then I will conclude with one takeaway.

So let’s start with the parables themselves. What is a parable? How do I recognize a parable? How do I understand or interpret a parable? There are literally 30

plus parables in your Bible. The first thing about a parable is it can be recognized by one of two words – like or as. In Matthew 13 most of the parables started out by saying ‘the Kingdom of God is like...’ or it is seen *as* something and that means it is a simile. In other words, what you are saying is similar. For instance, I would tell people after living in Birmingham these last two weeks that Birmingham is like Seattle. So I am saying that in some way Birmingham is like or similar to Seattle.

Secondly, a parable is more than a simile for a parable is an extended simile, into a short story form. It is not just Birmingham is like Seattle in some manner but it is extended in comparison in a short story or short narrative. That brings me to the third thing about a parable.

Thirdly, because a parable is a simile extended into a short story the story may contain multiple implications and applications but the parable has one purpose. A parable is a one-legged animal. Think of a one-legged animal jumping around. It may have many things attached to it but a parable has one central lesson and that is what is to be understood. Any implications or applications must flow from that lesson and not replace that lesson and be consistent with that lesson because it has a singular purpose. Let me use the Seattle illustration again. If I say Birmingham is like Seattle I’m just speaking simply in rainfall for I have just one thing that I’m comparing it to there. That is my only purpose in a simile. I could extend that to say that Birmingham is like Seattle because we have had as much rain in the last three weeks as they have had in three months. Now I’ve told a short story but I’m still getting one point across. Whenever you find a parable in the Bible that is what you find.

Now let’s look at the parables of Jesus. I want to give you three things about the parables of Jesus. First of all, why did Jesus teach in parables? Just in the studies of Holy Week have you noticed how many times Jesus did that just to fulfill prophecy? Did you notice how many prophecies Jesus fulfilled in that last week before He went to the cross? Most of the time when we look at the prophecies of Jesus we look at His birth, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and His second coming. There were a number of things about Jesus that He fulfilled affirmed Him as Messiah during His ministry and one is parables. Jesus teaching in parables was fulfillment of a prophecy as well and that also affirmed that He was the Messiah.

We see this in Matthew 13:34-35 which says [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.”* In other words, from here on when He was speaking to the multitudes in His ministry it would be identified as parables. Every time He preached to the multitudes He would use parables. There are parables all over the place. Now why did He do that? Psalm 78 is a Psalm of the Messiah and according to the Matthew 13:35 it was prophesied that the Messiah would speak in parables prophesied from Psalm 78:2. So His parabolic ministry was a visible statement of shouting “I am the Messiah and I have fulfilled that prophecy” for the Messiah would speak in parables.

What other reasons did He speak in parables? It became a unique instrument to speak to the multitudes. In other words, Jesus almost singularly, almost exclusively used parables when He taught but when He taught the multitudes. Seldom is there any evidence at all that He used them with the disciples. Notice in Matthew 13:1-3 which

says [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* (the crowd) *many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow.*

Now look at Matthew 13:10, 34 which says [10] *Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" [34] All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.* When I take a group of people this summer to Israel we will stand where this took place, where Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. It is right outside of Capernaum and the Gospel of Luke tells us that people were coming from all the cities. The crowds were enormous. This is the way they did it in the Old and New Testament. Here was the recognized teacher and he would go and sit down to teach. He did this when He taught the Sermon on the Mount where He went up on a mountain and sat down to teach the crowd and then everyone would stand while He was teaching. Today we say this professor occupies the 'chair' of... and that even comes into our language today and how we talk about things. You can just imagine Jesus going out in that boat and speaking to thousands of people in parables and that became a singular instrument to instruct the people of God.

Someone asked me once "Why do we not teach people in seminary to preach like Jesus and use more parables?" When Jesus teaches in parables we primarily think of the parable as an illustration to simplify and clarify. Maybe you don't want us to learn and teach in parables because it says that Jesus taught in parables to identify and magnify the spiritual condition of the hearers in the multitudes. If they had eyes to see and ears to hear they would understand and if they didn't have eyes to see and ears to hear they did not understand. Even more than that, it was magnified so those who had eyes to see and ears to hear not only were identified as trophies of grace but it also magnified their understanding. They grew through it and much was being given to them the text says but those who didn't understand were actually being diminished for it magnified what they didn't know and it creased their confusion, their distortion. In other words, when He taught in parables you could see who had eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to understand.

In the text, Jesus said 'do you understand?' and the disciples said 'yes.' Were they smarter than the people in the multitudes? No, but God's grace had sovereignly fallen upon them. They had been given eyes to see and ears to hear and the parables identified trophies of grace and magnified the work of grace as it added to it. It identified those who were strangers to grace and magnified their rejection of that glorious Kingdom of grace in His message. So the three things about the parables of Jesus was it had a singular purpose, it was to fulfill prophecy and had the unique purpose to identify and magnify those who did and didn't have eyes to see and ears to hear, their spiritual condition.

Now what about the seven Kingdom parables? I'm looking forward to going through all of these with you and particularly the parable of the sower which is the key to all of this. Did you notice how the text kept saying 'the Kingdom of God is like...' and how do you get into it? The Word has to be sewn in your heart. Satan would like to counterfeit to make you think you're in the Kingdom but you're not in the Kingdom. There are those who are bearing fruit yet there are the weeds that are mixed into it. Over time with that Word you become so excited about it that you would sell anything and

everything for that Kingdom. You begin to grow in that Kingdom and the Kingdom parables tell you that the Kingdom itself will grow. So this Kingdom of God is being laid before us in these seven parables.

I want to give you three things about these Kingdom parables. First, it reveals the present Kingdom and the future Kingdom. If you would have asked anyone in the days of Jesus where the Kingdom of God was they all would have said 'Israel.' Jesus is about to tell them they are wrong. Israel was the Kingdom of God through which I brought the Kingdom but this Kingdom is going to all the kingdoms of this world for its going everywhere. This Kingdom isn't just national but it's international. In the Old Testament it was a physical kingdom with spiritual implications and lessons. Now as we move forward it's a spiritual Kingdom with physical implications for it starts with the Word in the heart and it will go to the whole world. Wherever it goes it will make a difference for the birds will nest in it.

In these Kingdom parables this present Kingdom has a future and this Kingdom cannot fail! He rules over land and sea. This Kingdom is relentless and unstoppable. It will look like in some places that it is almost about to disappear at various times but it is inexorably moving to a fulfillment and a consummation into all the nations of the earth. When all His people have been brought from all the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God then comes the end, then comes the close of the age when His Kingdom moves throughout all the world and this one tells you that it is unstoppable. It is inevitably triumphant and not because of those in the Kingdom but because of the King Himself. It is present and moving throughout the world and its future is one of victory. Its presence heightens the necessity of the Word of God.

How do you enter it? How do you expand it? How do you embrace it? How do you value it? How do you discern what truly is the Kingdom? You can't enter it, embrace it, you won't value it, you won't discern it, without the Word of God. It is the Kingdom of God and the Word of God and it is assured in its triumph to the world. So the three things about the Kingdom parables are one they reveal the present and future expectation of the Kingdom of God, two it heightens the importance of the Kingdom of God and His Word and thirdly, it gives you an assured ending where it cannot fail.

Here Jesus embraces this unique ministry instrument called parables. So why does Jesus embrace parables, why does He use them to teach the Kingdom and why does it become a feature of His ministry? So I have tried to put this takeaway in one simple statement for you. The parable ministry of Jesus not only reveals that He is the Messiah but also reveals the spiritual disposition of the hearer and then accelerates it. Jesus taught in parables to fulfill Psalm 78 and He kept teaching in parables so that no one would miss the message.

Secondly, He taught in parables because the parable revealed the spiritual condition of the hearer. If they had eyes to see and ears to hear it was magnified in the ministry of the Word in general and the parable in particular. It could be seen and they would understand and embrace it. They would recalibrate and be transformed. If they didn't have eyes to see and ears to hear they couldn't wait for it to get over. For those who could see and hear it accelerated their growth.

I want to be as clear as I can using the Apostle Paul. Whenever you go out and share the Word of God, God's Word is always a watershed moment. You will go one way or the other. It is never neutral and it reveals a person's spiritual condition of

whether one is saved or being saved. If someone is saying they don't want sovereign grace then they will not want anything to do with it.

This is probably happening right now. There are some reading this that don't even want to finish it and I can understand that because there are many frailties and faults with this preacher and so that may be the reason, but it could be the disposition of your heart where you have no interest in it, with no eyes to see or ears to hear. You may be a trophy of grace but you have allowed yourself to feed at some other troughs and you don't really want the Word of God. It's very hard to sit and embrace God's Word if we've been in the death spiral of gossip or slander or a critical spirit or cynicism. The disposition of our spiritual state will many times and most often be revealed when that Word is shared in fellowship or preached.

All of you young men I meet with who are considering the ministry, you be ready for that. Work hard. You do your best. You'll try to get the illustrations that bring clarity, doing everything you can and even in your frailties you won't do it right and it just doesn't get home. This is never an excuse for you not to work on your preaching but many times it's the disposition of the hearer and that's why we're driven to prayer for the Word of God will have no success without the Spirit of God coming to give eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to receive. The spiritual things of the Lord are not embraced by the natural man until the Spirit of God begins to move. That's why prayer is always accompanying the Word.

As you are sharing the Gospel, go praying and sharing but remember the final testimony of the work and Word of God, whether it's the instruments of a parable or the general principles of God's Word, is the spiritual condition of the one in whom you are talking with. So pray and long for God to precede you, intervene and give eyes to see, and ears to hear. Don't take offense personally but just stay the course so that the Spirit of God can use the Word of God. Be engaged in sharing the Gospel and look to the Lord to do it.

Isn't that exactly what we see with Jesus? Here we are with multitudes and a chapter later they are all going to leave Him. Here is Jesus who is the talk of the town, celebrity, rock star preacher and He's getting downloaded more than John the Baptist was. Look at the crowd on Palm Sunday who came to see Jesus. Then look at the crowd on Good Friday. Then go up on Calvary and see one Apostle and a few faithful women but then take a look at that renewal after the resurrection and the Disciples minus one back in that Upper Room. Then see them out on the Mount of Olives at the ascension. Now He goes away and instead of being sorrowful they come back worshipping with joy because they now know and understand because they have eyes to see and ears to hear. They know the mission, the message and they are ready so His ascension no longer dismays them for now they see, understand and go back in that Upper Room to pray. Now those few at Calvary that renewal after the resurrection, increases to 120 in the Upper Room and now goes to 3,000 and to 5,000 and by Acts 17 it is shaking the world.

What's the difference? It is the Spirit of God who had been poured out upon them. They had eyes to see, ears to hear and a hunger for the majesty of Christ revealed in His Word, even through instruments like parables. I'm going to share with you a time I had worked really hard and long a passage for a sermon and it was burning within me. I preached it and I'm not even sure it registered that Sunday to those whom I preached it to. I went to the back of the church repenting that perhaps it was me. Later on I went to

Uganda and suddenly after some meetings they walked me over to a tent that had over a thousand teenagers and they said "Preach to them." I wasn't prepared so I went through my Bible and guess what I found? It was that sermon I had preached that passage that burned in me. This sermon would also have to be translated two different times as I preached it to these teenagers. I thought "If it was bad in my own language what is it going to be here?"

I didn't have much choice so I preached it anyway. When I was done the translator said to them in their language "Now do you want that Jesus?" Over one hundred teenagers came forward, singing while they were coming. I called the leader over and said "I don't think you translated that right. Go back and say these four points and then ask them again." He told me he did that but I told him to go back and read them again. Another 150 more teenagers came forward so over a quarter of those assembled that day committed their life to Jesus that day. Do you know what the difference was? The Spirit of God showed up when I preached to the teenagers but He didn't show up that other Sunday when I preached it at home. I don't know why but it must have been in God's sovereign plan.

I do know that we have to get God's Word about God's Kingdom through every instrument to this world and we have to go to our knees in prayer for without the Spirit of God no one will come to the glory of God in Christ from the Word of God. I pray in your life that God's Word is at that water cooler, as you're talking with others, in your small group, you hear in the pulpit despite all the frailties and inadequacies and I pray that it will merely show you have eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to receive and a hunger that will not be satisfied until the God of the Word through the Word of God by the Spirit of God fills your soul to the glory of God. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. I don't want God's Word just to come in and go out but I want to give you a few moments to grab hold of it between you and the Lord. King Jesus there are some who are reading this today and You have used Your Word by the Spirit of God to begin to give them eyes to see and ears to hear and a hunger for Jesus. They heard that Jesus went to the cross, died for their sins, rose again and so sent us in all of our frailties to them that they might hear through the Spirit of God that Jesus will save them if they will surrender by faith to Him alone. Friend, if you heard that today then give praise to God for He has given you eyes to see and ears to hear. I'd love to talk with you about this majesty of this new life in Christ. Call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 if you want us to show you how to get started in your new life with Christ. Father, there are Your people reading this today that are trophies of grace. We may have seasons where we have been drawn away from Your Word but perhaps by Your grace You have awakened it within us through the Holy Spirit this day. Would You give us not only eyes to see and ears to hear but a heart to embrace Your Word? Give us lives that show the growing power of the grace of God through His Word and then Father, fill us with the Spirit of God that we may rejoice in the Lord our God. We praise You that we have a Kingdom that cannot fail, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.