

MATTHEW 13:1-23
MESSIAH ON A MISSION (PART 25)

“A REVELATION OF GOD’S SECRET”



Key Themes

- To spiritually hear the message of the Kingdom of God, one must receive the engrafted word and produce fruits.
- In the present time, the kingdom is hidden and can only be accessed through revelation. Revelation only comes through the Spirit.
- Hidden truths are expressed through parables— one needs revelation to understand

“Parables describe and anticipate the kingdom” (Wilson, Theology, 405).

- Acceptance of the kingdom of God's message is expressed in terms of hearing (i.e., receiving) and bearing fruit— a motif already introduced earlier in Matthew (hearing; 11:4 – 5, 15; 12:19;— Bearing Fruit: 3:8; 7:15 – 20; 12:33 – 37)
- Chapter 13 contains the greatest concentration of parables in Matthew. Jesus uses eight parables and interprets three of them in the span of the parable discourse— the use of parables for teaching about the kingdom is tied to its hidden nature (13:13,44)



Jesus had been teaching inside a house; he came out of the house to teach the crowds. Later in the parables discourse, Matthew will indicate that Jesus leaves the public and goes back into the house, where he will explain his parables to the disciples (13:36). These location changes contribute to the motifs of secrecy and revelation in the parables discourse.



A farmer goes out to sow seeds. He uses the broadcasting technique, where handfuls of seed are tossed over the prepared soil. This method is meant for the ground that is already cultivated and would be turned under with the plow.

We may listen to a sermon with pleasure (Church websites, Holy Ghost radio, YouTube), yet, the mere love of sermons and addiction to preaching is no sign of the Spirit of God. Thousands of Christian people are like the Jews of Ezekiel's day: "thou art unto them has a very lovely song of one that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do not do them" (Ezekiel 33:32).



“WITH GOD’S HELP— PEOPLE CAN CHANGE”

(13:14-15)— In Isaiah 32:3-4, the text evokes the broader context of the book of Isaiah, primarily through the motifs of hearing and seeing in the ladder that Matthew draws on in 11:2 – 16:20. This means that although "This peoples heart has become calloused they have closed their eyes" the possibility for a reversal exists.

In Isaiah, God promises to bring such response reversals (Isaiah 32:3-4). Israel is invited to hear and see despite their current rebellion (42:18). So, in Matthew, Jesus asks the crowds to listen and respond (13:9), and some from the crowd will continue to respond to Jesus's message (15:31; 20:29 – 34).

CONCLUSION



- In context, this provides a picture of revelation given and received, which begets more revelation, and so on. Conversely, when a revelation is given and not received, God's revelation will eventually be taken away— like a plant that cannot find what it needs in harsh or inhospitable soil (13:5-7).
- So, Jesus's words in chapter 13 must be heard in this broader narrative context. Jesus speaks these words in 13:12: "whosoever will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."
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Footnote: Structure of the Parables Discourse

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This third major discourse in Matthew is carefully structured. An inside/outside motif follows the narrative frame of the chapter: Jesus speaks to the crowds (outside the house) in 13:1–35 and to his disciples (inside the house) in 13:36–52. Four pairs of parables also provide a structural pattern for the chapter. Each pair highlights some aspect of the nature of God's kingdom.

Outside:

13:1–9	Parable of the soils	A
13:10–17	Reason for parables: Isaiah quotation	Reason
13:18–23	Interpretation of the soils	
13:24–30	Parable of the wheat and weeds	B
13:31–32	Parable of the mustard seed	C
13:33	Parable of the yeast	C
13:34–35	Reason for parables: Psalms quotation	Reason

Inside:

13:36–43	Interpretation of wheat and weeds	
13:44	Parable of the treasure	D
13:45–46	Parable of the pearl	D
13:47–50	Parable of the fish and net (+ interpretation)	B
13:51–52	Parable of the house owner	A
13:53	Conclusion to Parables Discourse	

Footnote: Jesus' Teaching Style

According to the Gospels, Jesus was an outstanding teacher. Crowds were impressed not only by his authority, but by his teaching skill. Simplicity was one of his hallmarks. He rarely used technical theological speech. Jesus also liked to tell stories. But here we need a word of cultural warning: *Simplicity and story-telling do not betray a lack of profundity.*

The effectiveness of Jesus' work stemmed from *how* he said things. If we recognize these verbal strategies, we will not misinterpret his words. For example, Jesus (and his culture) enjoyed overstatement and gross exaggeration. In Mark 9:43—47 Jesus does not ask his disciples to mutilate themselves but wants to underscore *dramatically* the importance of sin. "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off..." The truest meaning of such verses is found in their figurative sense. Jesus talks about straining out gnats and swallowing camels. He describes how we see specks in another's eye, but miss the log in our own. These are a few examples of humorous and dramatic exaggerations meant to rivet audiences.

Jesus also used puns where wordplay in the original language created intriguing and amusing meanings. Some of these are in Greek: In Matthew 16: 18 Jesus says, "And I tell you that you are Peter [petros], and on this rock [petra] I will build my church, and the gates of death [Hadés] will not overcome it." The Aramaic word was kepha (Cephas; cf. John 1:42; I Cor. 3:22). Other puns are in Aramaic: in Matthew 23:24 Jesus contrasts a gnat and a camel chiefly because in Aramaic they sound similar (gnat, *galma*; camel, *gamla*).

Similes and metaphors provided colorful illustrations of his message. Disciples should be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). Faith should be like a grain of mustard seed (Luke 17:6). The Pharisees were like whitewashed tombs (Matt. 23:27). Disciples should both be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5: 13 — 16).

Footnotes (cont.):

Other techniques included proverbs, which expressed wisdom in a memorable or pithy form. "Where your treasure is, there heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Paradoxes created intriguing contradictions that needed unraveling to be understood. How can a widow who contributes to the treasury two tiny copper coins be credited with the largest gift (Mark 12:41-44)? How can the first be last and the last first (10: 31)? And how can someone gain life only by losing it (Luke 17:33)?

Jesus stood in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets when he used parabolic acts in order to demonstrate the meaning of his message. Instead of merely lecturing about God's love for the outcast, he ate meals with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 19:1-6). He underscored his criticism of Judaism's many Sabbath rules by breaking them (Mark 2:23-27). Rather than lecturing about corruption in the Jerusalem temple, he caused a public disturbance by upending tables and scattering coins (Mark 11:15-19).

This activity helps explain Jesus' many miracles and exorcisms. These were not only acts of compassion, for they also signaled how God's power was at work in Jesus and how his messianic kingdom was entering the world. Curiously in Mark 1: 27 after Jesus' first exorcism in Capernaum, the crowd shouts, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him."

(Burge et al. *The New Testament In Antiquity*, 151, 152)

Footnote:

THE PARABOLIC SAYINGS OF JESUS

Jesus' ministry was characterized by his use of parables and imagery. The following list sets out the syn-optic parables organized by the periods of Jesus' ministry. In John's gospel Jesus does employ imagery and metaphor (4:1-42; 10:1-42; 15:1-16) but nothing similar to the synoptic parables. (Where available, parables in the *Gospel of Thomas* are listed for comparison.)

(Burge et al. *The New Testament In Antiquity*, 153)

Footnote: Galilean Ministry Parables

The harvest is great (Matt. 9:35-38; cf. 4:23; 14:14; Mark 6:6, 34; Luke 8:1; 10:2; John 4:35)

The two debtors (Luke 7:41-43)

He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Matt. 1 1:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8, 14:35)

The sign of Jonah (Matt. 12:38-42; 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; Luke 11:16, 19-32; John 6:30)

The parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8; cf. *Thomas* 8)

The reason for speaking in parables (Matt. 13:10-17; Mark 4:10ff., 25; Luke 8:9f., 18; John 9:39)

The interpretation of the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15)

Jesus' true family (Matt. 12:46-50; cf. 7:21; Mark 3:20-21, 31 -35; Luke 8:19-21; John 15:14)

The seed growing secretly (Mark 4:26-29)

The wheat and the weeds (Matt. 13:24-30)

The mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18- 19; cf. *Thomas* 20)

The leaven (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13: 20-21)

Jesus' use of parables (Matt. 13:34-35; Mark 4:33-34)

The interpretation of the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:36-43)

The hidden treasure and the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:44ff.)

The fish net (Matt. 13:47-50)

Treasures old and new (Matt. 13:51f.)

The unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23-35)

(Burge et al. *The New Testament In Antiquity*, 153)