

Matthew 13

Jesus Teaches in Parables Concerning the Kingdom of Heaven.

The previous chapter ends with an explanation by Jesus as to who His true disciples are; He does not put His earthly relationships, even His mother and His brothers, before His spiritual family. Jesus said that His true family is the family of God who do the will of His Father in heaven. Joseph, His earthly father had to take second place to God.

Matthew 13 v 1-3

That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow... Jesus goes on to speak in parables: a parable is a heavenly story with an earthly meaning. We are able to understand them in the Spirit.

Matthew 13 v 4-23

4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear." 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; 15 For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.' 16 But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired 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 the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

In verse 11 Jesus explains that we have been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, we are those who have been called to know about the rule of Christ in our lives and increasingly in the world around us. Jesus said that we are to pray 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

The Sower

First of all, God's Word has to find a place in my heart, His word is the seed, He is the Sower and my heart is the ground into which He wants to sow His seed. There are from this passage evidently different types of ground or soil: hard, shallow, worldly, understanding. They equate to four conditions of the heart.

Hard Heart

Jesus speaks of this condition as being without any depth; it is like sowing grass seed on the motorway, the birds are the only ones who benefit from it. There may be a few tufts of grass here and there, but no real lush meadow grows from this kind of heart.

Mark 16 v 14

Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen.

Jesus links hardness of heart with unbelief, or lack of faith. The probable cause of this condition starts off in our minds. We are willing enough to hear the Word, but along comes some doubts and fears and we lose out to the devil's *birds of the air*. Christianity, as Jesus teaches time and time again, can only be pleasing to God as we exercise faith. To do this we shall have to exorcise or cast out doubts and fears. Hardness of heart has little to do with kindness or even loving others. We can still be kind and loving from a human standpoint and fail to satisfy the Lord. The question is, where will this word end up? It will either die in the stomach of a bird of the air or it will achieve the purpose for which it was sent and bear forth the fruit of an abundant life.

Shallow Heart

This condition of heart Jesus describes as one who has no roots in themselves; Paul refers to the importance of the root as in the following passage of Romans.

Romans 11 16-24

16 If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

Paul tells us that the root supports the branches, the root being Jesus. The branches, that is us, do not support the root. Each tree has its own root, branches and fruit. We are the garden of God into whom He sows His seed. We are to live on the Word of God and not by bread alone. The shallow hearted receives the word with joy, it has a good initial impression on them, but because there is no root, persecution and affliction eat away the good seed like the slugs and the many pests in the ground. The plant then withers away to nothing.

Worldly Heart

To be worldly is the fruit of an anxious mind, the inability to be able to really understand the heart of God and His provision for those who truly put their trust in Him. The world is the kingdom that we are in, but not of; it has no claim on us who have truly entered into the Kingdom of Heaven. The worldly heart is a deceived heart, it depends on its own efforts and rational intuition. The worldly heart is mastered and manipulated by the prince of this world, satan and for that person God will almost always be second to family, work, and leisure. Becoming *better off* in worldly terms can be a trap for the Christian. The flesh, I have discovered, has an insatiable appetite, it demands my whole energy to satisfy it. The following verses have been of great help to me.

1 Corinthians 6 v 12-20

12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. 14 Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16 Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh." 17 But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

I recently met a young man who works with YWAM (Youth With a Mission); he has been working in the Sudan with some nurses. He has also met a young lady who is employed in another part of Europe and has fallen in love with her, but the call of God in his life is stronger than his affection for his young lady. He has written to her proposing marriage. He was to have met her in September but has told her that because of his commitment to God's work in the Sudan he cannot meet her until May 1992. Will she accept his proposal? I believe that the Lord will cause her to accept his suggestion. This young man does not have a worldly heart.

Understanding Heart

I prefer the description given in Luke's account of this heart.

Luke 8 v 15

15 But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

Matthew's account emphasises the need to understand the Word; this is so important to recognise in order that we can do what we are called and instructed to do. In verse 10 of Matthew 13 we have covered those verses concerning our heart attitudes and we need to see why it is so important to do so. The disciples ask Jesus why He speaks in parables. He responds with a very profound statement of spiritual truth that is the difference between life and death! All of this links up with Paul's warning in *Hebrews 3-4* which is a study that we must look at.

We are promised by Jesus that we are to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, from the time that Jesus spoke to His first disciples, to the present time, this scripture is being fulfilled; there will be constant revelation given to those who ask, seek and knock at heaven's door, as well as an assurance that Jesus will never leave us but be standing at the door of our hearts to knock and to come in.

Revelation 3 v 20-22

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

There are those who will see and hear and yet not understand, Jesus reminds them of the prophet Isaiah's words of warning, yet He still says that if we will hear Him and return, He will heal us, not only physically, but spiritually.

The Tares

Matthew 13 v 24-30

24 Jesus presented another parable to 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 tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

This kingdom that we speak of is open to pilferers and burglars, so watch out for them.

These people are described as tares. The true description is that of a weed called Darnel which resembles wheat. It grows up with the real wheat until it comes to the time of harvesting, it is then that it becomes obviously an imitation. Some people that attend churches throughout the land, denomination and non-denomination are like this. The devil deceives and captivates even well-meaning saints and uses them to destroy the work of God. Jesus says we are not to pull up these tares, in case we tear up good roots.

We are told to let them develop and grow until their fruit becomes obvious, then we should remove them and they will be burned up.

The Mustard Seed

Matthew 13 v 31-32

31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."

The Kingdom is also described as a mustard seed; which a man planted in his field. Although it was smaller than any other seed at that time, when it was fully grown it became very large and a place of habitation for many. Luke has this to say:

Luke 17 v 5-6

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you."

A little faith goes a long way and grows and grows and grows, but only as you use it.

The Leaven

Matthew 13 v 33-43

33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." 34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world." 36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Jesus explains the principle of the leaven. In the bible, the leaven often represents the evil and the unclean; but here we can see that the good leaven should be influencing the bad. The bad apple will affect the good apples, but our faith in practice can remove the bad.

The Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13 v 44

44 *"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

The realm of heaven is like finding concealed riches, it brings great joy and is worth sacrificing everything for.

A Costly Pearl

Matthew 13 v 45-46

45 *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

The dominion of heaven is like a dealer looking for expensive pearls, perhaps in the same way as we seek bargains as we shop. He sells everything to obtain it.

The Net

Matthew 13 v 47-52

47 *"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; 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 Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

Heaven's kingdom is compared to a large net being pitched into the sea. Not everything will be kept when it is filled. Our lives are continually being scrutinised by the Holy Spirit and things not of the Kingdom will be removed. We are encouraged to confess and to repent of these things or be disciplined by the Lord, because He loves us. Jesus asks if the disciples have understood all that they have been taught and they were able to say yes. Can you say yes? Have you understood?

Matthew 13 v 53-58

53 When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there. 54 He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Finally, we see Jesus return to Nazareth; the folk there were amazed that He had so much wisdom and power. I believe that we also should have the same wisdom and power in His precious name. Are we only known as the sons and daughters of our natural parents? Should we not be of royal reputation? Jesus says at the end of this passage *A prophet is not without honour except in his hometown and in his own household.* Should we not honour each other more than we do, especially in our own household? Husbands, wives, sons and daughters? Jesus was unable to do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

A final question: do I honour those that God has joined me to in my Christian family? All that I do and say will be judged. We looked at this in Matthew 12.

Matthew 12 v 33-37

33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. 36 But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

A final resolution: I desire to put all dishonouring resolutions down.

2 Corinthians 5 v 14-17

14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

This has to be a declaration of faith; faith will deny the facts and bring us into a new place in Christ.