

Matthew 13:1-17

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 5/29/2011

The Parable of the Sower – Part 1

Prayer

Father, we are so thankful for your tremendous mercy and love, for your grace and your kindness which you bestowed upon us in sending Your Son Jesus to die for our sins. Father, it is so far beyond us to comprehend your love for us and to comprehend His love for us that He would die for our sins. Father, we're thankful for the truth that You have revealed concerning Christ in your Word. And Father, I thank You for the opportunity we have today to look into Your Word. And I pray You would convict us of any sin - You would help us to come before You with clean hearts - that we would confess our sins knowing that You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness and that we would be ready with hearts prepared and tilled to receive Your Word, Your powerful Word which is able to save those who are not saved and is able to change us and make us like Christ. Father, I ask You to bless Your Word as it goes out. May it bring You glory and honor today. We pray this in Your precious name. Amen.

Sermon

Well, when I went to seminary - and I share often situations there which were turning points in my walk with Christ as I was confronted with the way the world does ministry - when I went to seminary, in one of my preaching classes I was told basically that Jesus Christ was a story telling man, that that is how He got the crowds, that that is how He brought a crowd to hear the Word, through telling stories. And I was clearly convicted at that time, because of God's Word, that that is not true.

As we have seen in the book of Matthew, the Lord Jesus clearly laid forth His Word and we will see today that it is only when the people rejected His Word that He started to veil His Word by telling parables. Jesus did not use stories to help people understand; He used stories to conceal His truth from those who rejected Him and to help reveal it to those who had accepted Him.

You know, we have been going through the book of Matthew, and God's Word is powerful. And we are going to see today very clearly that we are responsible when we hear God's Word. It is a very dangerous thing to listen to God's Word and not to respond to it. And today we come before the Lord and we share His Word; and I exhort you to have your hearts prepared and ready to hear and respond to His life-giving Word. Today we are going to see the Parable of the Sower. We are not going to see the explanation but we are going to see the Parable of the Sower. Then we are going to see very clearly, I believe, why Jesus begins at this point in the ministry to speak in parables. So would you turn in your Bibles with me to Matthew, chapter 13, and I am going to briefly review the context of the book of Matthew to bring us up to date to where we are.

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Matthew is about the Messiah King, about King Jesus. Matthew is about God the Son who took on human flesh. He came to save His people from their sins. We saw very clearly that the Word affirms that He is the Messiah. We saw the responses of those to the Messiah's birth, the murderous hate of Herod. We saw the agitation of the Jews. And we saw also very clearly the desire of the Gentile magi to worship Him.

We saw that John the Baptist prepared the way for the Savior preaching, "Repent for the Kingdom is at hand." We saw very clearly that the King had come. We saw Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, God in human flesh, identify with sinful man as He was baptized. And we saw Him begin His ministry where He was preaching and teaching and affirming that preaching and teaching with the miraculous. As He says in His Word, there was a great light that came among darkness.

And then we had an encapsulation in the book of Matthew of the teaching of Jesus Christ in chapters 5-7, where we call it "The Sermon on the Mount." Jesus taught and preached the kingdom there. He taught and shared very clearly what a kingdom citizen looks like. God in human flesh! What a gracious God to come to His people who have actually rejected Him - they were sitting in darkness - and to shed light on their spiritual condition! Even today we have those who claim to be believers, but God is a gracious God to share His Word and to show you what a true believer looks like. And that is what He was doing there.

We saw the blessed, those who exhibited blessedness because of a genuine relationship with the living God, those who mourned over their sin, who hunger and thirst for righteousness - those things that only a redeemed heart can do. We saw very clearly the Lord Jesus address the false teaching and the Pharisees. "You have heard it said, but I say to you..." The Great I AM says, "This is what I meant and said." And we saw Him bring His teaching to a pinnacle where He said, "Enter by the narrow gate." There is the broad road that leads to destruction, but Christ is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by Him.

And we saw very clearly Jesus said there would be threats to entrance into the kingdom - "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing who inwardly are like ravenous wolves..." - that you will know them by their fruit. "Good trees do not produce bad fruit and bad trees do not produce good fruit." And then we saw a picture of the fruit of false teachers, those who would believe they are saved and say, "Lord, Lord, didn't we do this?" But yet they were not saved; they were still in their sins. And Jesus would say, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

And then He gave an illustration to help us understand who is truly saved. There are those who hear the Word of God and because they have been redeemed, they can act upon the Word of God and do it. And there are those who hear the Word of God and do not do it. And he compared them to those who would build their house on the sand or on the rock. And obviously being built on the foundation of the truth of Christ, in Christ Himself they would stand. And those on the sand would build their lives and yet eternally fall. So we had an encapsulation, the teaching of Christ, in chapters 5-7.

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Then in chapters 8 and 9, we had an overview of the miraculous which accompanied the teaching. If you remember, we saw in the end of chapter 4 it said Jesus went preaching the gospel and teaching and doing the miraculous; and then in the end of chapter 9, the same phrase: He went teaching and preaching and doing the miraculous. It is an encapsulation of the ministry of Christ.

And in chapters 8 and 9, we saw the affirming miracles that affirmed the person and Word of Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ is sovereign over the physical sphere. He is sovereign over the supernatural sphere, over the demonic. He is sovereign over sin and death. He brings forgiveness of sins and raised one from the dead.

And then we saw in chapter 10 the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ as He prepares His disciples to send them out. And we saw instructions for disciples. And we saw His heart where He said, "Beseech the Lord of the harvest. The harvest is plentiful. There are a lot of unsaved people out there. Lift up your eyes. They are going to hell. Beseech the Lord of the harvest to send workers." And then the Lord Jesus sends His own disciples.

And then in chapters 11 and 12, we saw the outright opposition to Christ begin to formulate. We saw in chapter 11 that Jesus compared this present generation to those who had rejected them. He compared them to spoiled children in the marketplace who are playing games with God. They are upset because God is not playing religion the way that they want Him to play. And then we saw very clearly the brutal condemnation of the unrepentant cities, those who would experience a stricter judgment because they saw so much truth and the miraculous concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Then in chapter 12 on the heels of that condemnation, we saw the Pharisees try to set up Christ on the Sabbath. Very clearly they wanted to show Him as a Sabbath-breaker. The paradigm of their false ministry – part of it was the Sabbath, and so they plotted when He did not respond rightly to what they had tried to set Him up with. When He revealed that they were the ones with evil motives and thoughts, we saw them plotting to destroy Him or to kill Him at this point - opposition totally manifest!

And then the Lord Jesus made it clear that they had committed the unpardonable sin. These Pharisees (as the Lord Jesus cast out a demon from the demoniac, healed His blindness and gave him speech), the Pharisees attributed that work that Jesus had done by the Holy Spirit, they attributed it to Satan. And that, by that point, was unforgivable. They had seen the truth; they had been convicted of the Word; they had seen the incredible miraculous work of the Holy Spirit through the person of Christ, and they attributed it to Satan. And Jesus made it clear that all sin will be forgiven except blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. You see when the Spirit of God convicts you clearly and you reject that, it is not forgivable. When you reject the clear conviction of the Word of God concerning your sin and concerning the Savior Jesus Christ -when you push that away (you reject that) – it is totally unforgivable. And these same Pharisees at this point demanded another sign from Jesus. And Jesus said, "The only sign you are going to see is the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man would be in the ground for three days and three nights. The only thing you are going to see from this point on is His death and resurrection." And then Jesus made it clear that they were a brood of vipers, those Pharisees; they were offspring of venomous snakes. Their wicked

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teaching was poisonous and deadly. They were hypocrites; they were clean on the outside and dirty on the inside. And He calls the generation an evil and adulterous generation. Your nature is evil when you reject Christ. And you are adulterous if you have any other religiousness apart from dependence and trust in Christ. And then Jesus said to them because He is greater than Jonah and Solomon – He gave those illustrations – that this evil and adulterous generation was more culpable in the judgment.

And then we had an illustration of a demon being cast out and a house being cleaned up. And very clearly the demon decides to come back and finds the house cleaned up and brings seven worse demons, and the state is worse in the end than in the beginning. It is very dangerous to clean yourself up religiously apart from faith in Christ. And that is what Jesus compared this evil generation to. So God in human flesh is totally condemning these Jews. He came and He shared His Word graciously of the truth that they needed to repent of their sins and turn to Him, that their condition as we saw in the Sermon on the Mount was heart condition, that they needed cleansed hearts. Blessed are those who have cleansed, literally cleansed, hearts.

And now at this point, Israel and the Pharisees, the leaders and the people, are outright beginning to oppose Jesus, and that is where we come to our passage today. So let's look in our Bibles. If you will turn with me to Matthew, chapter 13, we will be looking at verses 1 through 17. Now I was going to teach 1 through 23 today because that is the whole section. And usually, if you have been with us, we teach only a couple verses. But sometimes it is all brought together so I was going to teach the whole thing. If we decided to do the whole thing, then we have to have an all-church lunch and an all-church dinner today! This takes awhile, okay?

Well, let's look at 1 through 17.

¹ On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea. ² And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. ³ And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying "Behold, the sower went out to sow; ⁴ and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ And others fell upon 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 And 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 And He answered and said to 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 shall more be given, and he shall 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 And in their case the

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prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ¹⁵ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD 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."* [Mathew 13:1-17]

That is where we will go today, but I want to keep reading what we will look at next week: its explanation. Verse 18:

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. (That is the hard-hearted, we will see. And the birds came and ate them up) ²⁰ And 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. (That is the shallow heart) 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 riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (that is the worldly heart) ²³ And the one on whom the seed was sown on the good soil (or beautiful soil literally), 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."*

So today we will be looking at verses 1 through 17, and we will see, I believe, next week the explanation of the parable. But today we are going to see, "Why did Jesus turn away from preaching and teaching clearly to the people?" And I think we are going to see very clearly that for those of us here, we need to act upon the truth that we hear. We are culpable for the Word of God when we hear it. Therefore if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

Okay, so as we begin our look at our passage, notice Jesus, as I shared, had condemned the generation for their rejection and begins to speak in parables. Verse 1 of chapter 13: ¹ "On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea. ² And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. ³ And He spoke many things to them in parables..." So the text begins with the phrase, "On that day..." And it is really important that we realize what day this is that Jesus begins to speak in parables rather than teaching plainly and clearly to the Jews.

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Now before we look at “this day,” I want to just briefly share what a parable is so we can understand at the start. The word parable comes from the Greek word, *parabole*, which speaks of *para* (alongside) and *bole* (to throw) and it means literally to throw alongside. A parable would be used to throw alongside something to explain that. So in and of themselves, parables do not really mean anything. They are actually something that explains something else.

Now I need to warn you concerning parables. As we will see next week, we do not want to take them past their intended meaning. What do I mean by that? As I shared, they are simply an illustration pointing to something else. We do not want to break down every little facet of the parable – that is not the point. There is a main point; there is an intended meaning the writer by the Holy Spirit is putting forth, and that is what we are looking for.

So then, what is the occasion of this parable? On what day? What is He talking about? Look at verse 1: “¹ On that day...” and then verse 3: “³ And He spoke many things to them in parables...” There is a change. Why the change? I mentioned it before but back in chapter 12 on the same day, a demon-possessed, blind, dumb man was brought to Him, and He healed him. He cast out the demon (His power over the demonic – miraculous), and He caused that demoniac, with the demon gone, to speak and see. He gave the blind sight. It is absolutely miraculous. On that day, this happened - an incredible, irrefutable miracle built on so many other miracles that He had already done, built on the truth that He had taught over and over again. And seeing this irrefutable miracle, the Pharisees in the hardness of their hearts attributed it to Satan. On that day... that is when that happened.

Jesus also just condemned them on that day: the brood of vipers, poisonous, religious snakes, offspring of venomous poison. And we see Jesus’ condemnation. If you go back a little earlier in Matthew, chapter 12, let’s look at verse 39. This is when they wanted another sign; they wanted more signs! And by the way, the seeking of signs is an evidence of unbelief, as we saw a few weeks ago.

³⁹ But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰ for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² "The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon (and when we looked at that, it was the wisdom of the Lord she was seeking); and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. [Matthew 12:39-42]

This evil and adulterous generation did not repent! And Jesus was condemning them. He was gracious to bring His Word to them, and they came to a point where they hardened their hearts and they did not repent. And it is on this day He begins to speak in parables.

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So what does our text say? “On this day” and then verse 3: ³“And He spoke many things to them in parables...” As I shared earlier, He gave a chilling condemnation of the Jews, comparing them to someone who was demon-possessed and cleaned up and then repossessed with seven worse demons. A chilling illustration and warning to those who would clean themselves up religiously. You see, Israel had gotten rid of their idols. They were “quote, unquote” on the outside following the Lord; but on the inside, they were wicked at heart. And their state was worse in the end than in the beginning. So on this day, this sad day for the people, God was in their midst revealing Himself, affirming it with the miraculous, and they were to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. And they rejected Christ.

And folks, I cannot stop at this point from exhorting you. There is a point where God will allow you to go your own way. He convicts you with His powerful Word. You are dead in your sins, but He convicts you with His powerful, living and active Word. And if you reject that, there is a day where God will let you go your own way. It is very serious; everything I say from the Word of God, you are culpable for from this point. It is a very dangerous thing to come to church. If someone invited you to church today, it was a very dangerous thing they did because you are now responsible before the living God for His Word. And there is a day when God will allow your eyes to be shut and your ears to be closed because you have rejected His truth. Do not allow it to get to that point.

So what do we see in our text? ¹“On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea. ²And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. ³And He spoke many things to them in parables...” So Jesus, on that same day He condemned the generations and the Pharisees, He got up and He went to the sea – He is sitting by the sea – and all of a sudden, here come the crowds again. And they gathered to Him, so He got into a boat. And He sat there in the boat, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. And He spoke to them in parables.

And then we have the parable. Verse 3: “Behold, the sower went out to sow.” It is a simple parable. This was the lifestyle around this area at that time. They would plant and they would harvest. That is how they got their food. The sower went out to sow – it is a farmer. He went out to sow, to throw the seed out. It was a common reality for them; they would understand this illustration.

And so what does he do? ⁴“...and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up.” What do you think of? A road is compact dirt; it is hard. Now if I were to throw seeds on this aisle right here, they would not go in, would they? They would just sit on the top and the birds would come in. It is a reality they would be able to see. Simple picture.

Second one. Verse 5 says, ⁵“And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil...” This is soil that has got a lot of rocks. So it is very thin soil – not much soil. And the seeds went in and they immediately sprout up; but because there is no depth and no roots, very clearly when the sun had arisen (verse 6), they were scorched because they had no root and withered away. Very simple illustration.

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Then there is a third one. “⁷ And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out.” Some among thorns came up, obviously, and the thorns choked out the real plant.

And then the last example, verse 8: “⁸ And others fell on the good soil (or *kalos* soil, beautiful soil – you can see it is good. And look what happens), and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. ⁹He who has ears, let him hear.” We will see later on really clearly the Lord is the one who sows the seed and the seed is the Word of God and the crop that comes forth is the manifestation of the Word of God in a true believer. And here, we have a tremendous harvest. Now this parable, as they were sitting there listening to it, everything would make sense to someone who does not know Christ – just any person listening and understanding these basic realities. Everything makes sense until the point where He says hundredfold, sixty and thirty. That is an incredible harvest! You know, a harvest of eightfold was probably the best they would ever see. This is an incredible harvest. So then, Jesus is speaking in parables to the multitudes. And by itself, when I read this parable – and if you do not listen to the little things I add in from what we will see later – it just speaks of sowing seed. There is no value spiritually to this parable apart from its exposition and interpretation. And Jesus is now sharing these things that have no value to those which do not hear the explanation. It is important to see that.

At this point, the disciples are perplexed because Jesus has been clearly teaching and preaching the Word of God everywhere He is going, teaching and preaching and proclaiming the gospel, the kingdom. It says in chapter 4:17 He was preaching, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” You need to prepare your heart; you need to recognize your sin because the King is at hand. The soil of your heart needs to be torn apart so that you can receive the truth concerning Christ. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And these people did not repent. They were hardened hearts.

And so the disciples come to Him now perplexed. And notice, there is a little key here. He says in verse 9, “He who has ears, let him hear.” There are some people that can hear and some people that cannot. He who has ears, let him hear. And in verse 10, “And the disciples came to him and said, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’” “Why are you doing this, Jesus?” At this point in Matthew, He has not spoken in parables at all; He has spoken freely. In the beginning of His ministry, He spoke freely. He never spoke in parables that were not explained to the multitudes. Now He will only explain them to those who it has been granted to. Why are you doing this, Jesus?

And again, who are the disciples? If you remember from chapters 10 and 11, the term disciples simply means a learner. It speaks of one who places himself under the authority of another to learn and be taught. We saw clearly in chapter 10, verse 24, a disciple is not above his teacher. And if you are a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, you have come into a relationship with Him through faith, and you place yourself under His authority to learn and obey what He says. That is what we see in Matthew 28. The church is not called to make converts. The church is not called to just get a bunch of people saved. It is called to make disciples. Matthew 28, verse 19:

“¹⁹ Go therefore (or literally having gone – in your going) **and make disciples of the nations,** (and how so? Make disciples 2 ways) **baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son**

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and the Holy Spirit, (do not ever try to disciple someone that does not have an outward affirmation of an inward change. And then He says) ²⁰ **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...** [Mathew 28:19-20a]

That is a disciple, one who learns from Christ and obeys Christ.

So then there were many disciples originally with Jesus; there were multitudes of people that would be disciples, but they were weeding out as Jesus was sharing His Word. And we know Jesus had personally chosen twelve disciples including one which was a traitor (which He understood), eleven true believers and one make-believer – one faker, Judas. And if you remember the sermon we saw three weeks ago in the book of Matthew, the end of chapter 12, that Jesus' family is coming. And we looked at it very clearly from there and then from the other passages that it appears as though they are thinking He is crazy – they want to save Him from what He is doing – He is going to get Himself killed. And they say, "Your family is out there waiting to see you" and He says, "Who are My mother, My brothers, and My sisters?" And He points to His disciples and says, "Those who do the will of My Father." Or in Luke, it says, "Those who obey the Word." Those who obey the Word, those are disciples. Luke, chapter 8, verse 21:

²¹ **"But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.'"** [Luke 8:21]

True disciples hear God's Word and obey God's Word because they have been changed. True disciples.

If you are not a learner concerning Christ, if you are not in the Word of God – you do not want to be in the Word of God, sermons are boring, these things like that, you are not a disciple of Christ. Do not fool yourself! Disciples submit to Christ; they place themselves under His authority to learn and obey Him. Those are true disciples.

So His disciples come to Him and say, "Why parables? What is up? Why are You speaking this way? You have changed the way You are ministering to the multitudes. Why are You doing this?" Then look at His answer in verse 11: ¹¹ "And He answered and said to them (now notice there are going to be two groups here), 'To you (that is the disciples) it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (that is the multitudes) it has not been granted. ¹² For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. (And let me remind you, this is God's Word – you are responsible now that you are hearing it today. Do not harden your hearts.) 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.'"

The word *understand* comes from an interesting word that speaks of the joining of two rivers. It is this joining, it is the "I got it" moment, right? They do not understand because their eyes and ears, as we will see, have been voluntarily closed and plugged. So then middle of 11: "To you (disciples – those who do the will of His Father in heaven, those true believers) it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." It has literally been given – *didomi* – given to you, perfect tense. It was given

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to you in the past and the results continue right now. It has been given to you, My disciples. It has been granted you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The word *to know* – *ginosko* – speaks of knowledge, just like *oida*, but it does not speak of simply perceiving or understanding. But it speaks of knowledge that is often in the context of a relationship. You know, we understand that: Adam knew his wife. There was relationship. “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Now the term *mystery* does not mean mysterious like we have. It just means something that has been hidden in the past. It has been granted to you to know that previous hidden truth concerning the kingdom of heaven.

Now again, what is the kingdom of heaven? What is this? In Luke we have parallel passages that speak of the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of heaven or what is the kingdom of God? Remember back in chapter 3, John the Baptist, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus Himself (Matthew 4:17), “Repent for the kingdom is at hand.” You have to repent. You have to turn to God from sin because the kingdom is at hand. What does He mean? Well, if you remember, we saw very clearly that kingdoms are associated with kings. The kingdom of heaven is the sphere in which the King reigns. The kingdom of God is God’s kingdom, the kingdom in which God reigns. And as we saw very clearly in chapter 1 that Jesus Christ is the King; He is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords. If the King is in your midst, the kingdom is at hand. It has come upon you.

And He says, “It has been granted to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Those are those mysteries that have to do with the King and His kingdom. Christ is the One who reigns over heaven, He is the One who reigns over the hearts of the redeemed, and He is the One who will reign over this earth after He brings forth judgment. And folks, because of our sin, we are separated from the King and His kingdom. You see, the wages of sin is death. We have rebelled against the King and the ruler of this universe. We have rebelled against the Creator. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you are delivered from darkness into the domain or kingdom of His beloved Son. Colossians, chapter 1, verse 13, speaking of believers, Paul says to the Colossian church,

¹³ For He delivered us from the domain of darkness...” [Colossians 1:13a]

I was held captive by my sin in Satan’s domain, but He delivered us and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption – that is the payment of the price, forgiveness of sins. It is through the paid price, that Jesus paid for our sins, that we are forgiven.

And then it says here, “To you it has been granted (disciples, true believers) to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Well, very clearly earlier, Jesus had been sharing the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to everybody actually. But now He is concealing those things, as we will see. Whoever has not, even what he has will be taken away. Folks, the reality is when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you can now because of the Spirit of God understand the truth of the person of Christ and His kingdom. It was granted to these apostles to have relational knowledge regarding these formally hidden truths concerning Christ and His kingdom. Do you remember Jesus’ rebuke in Matthew 7 (I have made

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mention to it earlier), His rebuke of the make-believers that are still in their sin? He says in Matthew 7, verse 21,

“²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.” [Matthew 7:21]

When you have a changed heart because of the forgiveness of sins and a relationship with Christ, you can now do God’s will and that is an evidence that you are in the kingdom, transferred into the kingdom as a beloved son. He says, “Many will say to me on that day (the day of judgment; there is a day we stand before Christ) – many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not cast out demons in Your name? Or perform many miracles?’ Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you (there is no genuine relationship)... you who practice lawlessness.” Or as John says, “Lawlessness is sin.”

Ultimately the hidden truths concerning the kingdom end up pointing to the King, by the way. Think about what Paul shares to the Colossians, beginning in Colossians, chapter 2. Let me share this. After saying very clearly that we proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching every man that we may present every man complete in Him, this is why I (Paul) labor and agonize and strive according to His power - it is all about Christ; Christ is the hope of glory. It is all about Christ – and then he says in chapter 2, Colossians,

“¹ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf (this is why I struggle; this is what I aim for), and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face (Paul writes), ²that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance and understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is Christ, Himself, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” [Colossians 2:1-3]

The amazing, hidden truth was that God would come in human flesh and dwell among man. And He reveals that to you; but if you reject it, He will take that away from you and you cannot be saved. God came to take away your sins, the hidden truths concerning Christ. To you it has been granted, but to them, no. To them, no.

And then notice He explains a little more in verse 12, back in chapter 13: “For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” For – He’s explaining. There are really, truly the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Whoever (and that is whoever has been granted this knowledge, right?), whoever has been granted knowledge concerning the mysteries of the kingdom, whoever has this, he shall have an abundance. What a wonderful statement! When you have truly come to Christ, and you have knowledge of Him (true, relational, saving knowledge of Christ), all you are going to get is more about Christ to the point where we stand in His presence and know Him. Right? What a wonderful thing! What an amazing statement!

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But notice the contrast in the middle of 12: "...but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." Now it is singular (him); it is personal. You see those who it has been granted to and those who it has not been granted to. This leaves the question (it does not make sense) how can someone not have something and then have it taken away? Look at what He says, "...but but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." How can someone not have anything and then have it taken away from him? I believe in context, Jesus is clearly making a case that those (who were granted the knowledge of Him through His teaching and preaching), they did not respond. And what they have now will be taken away. Pretty scary thought! There is a time window that God allows you to respond to His truth; and there is a time where God in His sovereignty, as we will see, cuts that off. If you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. Do not push away the truth; seek the Lord while He may be found because there is a day when you will not be able to find Him because He will veil Himself from you. Look at verse 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." Therefore. Because God grants to whom He will grant; He is sovereign. He takes away when He takes away; He is sovereign. "Therefore I speak to them in parables..."

In chapter 11 - after Jesus declared judgment on the cities who did not repent – remember what He said? Let's turn to chapter 11, verse 25. Jesus has just condemned those who saw the miracles. They heard the Word; they saw the miraculous and they shoved it away because of hardness of heart, because they loved their sin. You would think Jesus would say after condemning them to judgment, "What a horrible thing!" What does He say? Matthew 11:25-27:

²⁵ At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. ²⁶ "Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight. ²⁷ "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. [Matthew 11:25-27]

God is sovereign and He very clearly wills that you hear the truth; but when you reject it, He wills that you no longer can respond. And as we will see, He allows you in that darkness to go then to judgment. It is very serious what you hear. God is sovereign over the message, and when He shares it to you. He chooses when to share it and when to retract it, when to allow you to have the opportunity to understand and when you will not.

And notice verse 13: "...because..." Because. Jesus is speaking in parables because He is sovereign. Notice He says, "Therefore I speak to them in parables..." This is why. Then He says, "Because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." What does He mean here? "I speak in parables because they see and they do not see, but they hear and they do not hear. And they ultimately do not understand." What does He mean? He is going to explain this.

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Verse 14: ¹⁴ *“And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ¹⁵ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR (or with difficulty hear, literally), AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM.”* This is an amazing thing! God is now clearly relating a prophecy from the book of Isaiah to the people here who had rejected the Son of God who was in their midst.

He is sharing from Isaiah, chapter 6, and if you want to turn there for a minute, we will look at this. If you are familiar with Isaiah, chapter 6, very clearly it is in the day in which King Uzziah had died, very clearly that Isaiah is given a vision. He sees the Lord lofty and holy. And the words are being spoken, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.” Isaiah, chapter 6. And Isaiah realizes that he lives among a people with unclean lips. He sees the Lord and he realizes he is sinful. When you are confronted with the Word of God, you can go two ways: you can harden your heart or acknowledge the truth that you are sinful. Notice what He says in Isaiah, chapter 6, verse 5:

⁵ *“Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! (I am ruined – that is a plowed heart) because I am man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”* ⁶ *Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs.* ⁷ *And he touched my mouth with it and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.’* ⁸ *Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us (that is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For who will go for us)?’* *Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”* [Isaiah 6:5-8]

Isaiah is living at a time in which Israel is on the road to judgment. They have rejected the Lord; they are this close to their disciplinary judgment. They are not responding so God says, “Who will go?” and Isaiah says, “Send me.” And then here is his commission; here is what God tells him. He says,

“...go, and tell this people (verse 9): ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’” ¹⁰ *Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Lest they see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.* (Sounds familiar, right?) ¹¹ *Then I said, ‘Lord, how long?’ And He answered, ‘Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant, Houses are without people, And the land is utterly desolate...’”* [Isaiah 6:9-11]

Proclaim the truth that people are on the way to judgment because of their hardened hearts! They are not going to respond. And Jesus uses this illustration to say, “These guys are past the point of no return. Therefore I speak to them in parables.” Very serious! It is a confirmation of their judgment at this point. And if you look back in our passage in Matthew 13, look at verse 14. “And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND

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YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE..." Keep on looking and seeing, but they are not going to get it at this point, and He explains why. Is it because God is a mean God and He is just going to judge them? Is that why? Is God a mean god? God is a gracious God, a loving God, a sovereign God; and He had produced and brought forth His Word through His Son and they had rejected it.

And notice whose responsibility it is, verse 15: "FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL..." Stop there. The term *dull* means literally thickened or fat, impervious, insensitive. It is hard. They have hard hearts. They have become hard. When you hear the Word of God, you either get hardened or you get saved. They have become hard and therefore they are not going to hear; they are not going to listen. "I have given them over; I am not going to give them revelation. That is why I speak in parables." Very serious!

And what is it that causes hearts to be hard? It is the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3). The Lord God, in human flesh - a great light had come upon them in darkness (John, chapter 1, verse 9), a light that enlightens every man. Everybody is convicted; the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin. The Word of God convicts. But because they loved their sin, they allowed their hearts to be hardened; they allowed it to happen. And if you are allowing your heart to be hardened to Christ, you are on the road to judgment. It is a dangerous thing to come to church and hear the Word of God. You are responsible for it.

So then, because they hardened their hearts, He is going to speak in parables. But notice, He says also, "...AND WITH THEIR EARS (middle of 15) THEY SCARCELY HEAR (or they are clogged, basically. They barely hear or with difficulty, literally. Look at this), AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES." They are the ones that have done it. God in their midst: they are shutting their eyes, they are shutting their ears, they are rejecting Him so God rejects them. "FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES..." Closed their eyes. Folks, God gives you over and removes truth and your ability to respond to truth when you reject Him and do not repent of your sin. It is very serious. And it has to do with salvation. He says in verse 15 in the middle of it: "...LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM." The term *return* speaks of repenting. and *I should heal them* speaks of salvation. If you look at Mark, chapter 4, I will read it for you - verse 11 (parallel account):

¹¹ "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables (if you are in the kingdom, you have been granted to understand these truths about Christ. If you are outside, you get it in parables), ¹² in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand lest they return and be (Mark says) forgiven." [Mark 4:11-12]

You see, God calls upon you to turn, to repent, to turn from your sin to Christ. You are sinful; you are in need of a savior; you are in a desperate situation. You are accountable for you sin before the God of the universe who will judge you and He says, "Turn to me and be saved." Friend, it is not God's fault that

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anyone leaves this life unforgiven. They close their eyes; they harden their hearts. It is not God's fault; the responsibility fully falls upon you. And if you reject the convicting influence of the truth of the Word of God by the power of the Spirit, God will allow you to be veiled and not see. This was clearly affirmed in Acts, chapter 28. The apostle Paul is sharing and testifying about the kingdom and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus; and in verse 24 of Acts 28, he says,

²⁴And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word (and here is Paul's parting word. Listen to this: Acts 38, the middle of 25), "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers ²⁶saying, 'Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; ²⁷For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them.'" ²⁸Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen. [Acts 28:24-28]

God will remove it from you and go to someone else. We see that. If you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. Am I saying from this passage that now everything you are going to hear about the Word of God is in parables? No, this was when Jesus was on the earth, but the principle remains. We saw it in what Nick read earlier in 2 Corinthians 4, and I'm going to read this. Verse 3:

³And even if our gospel is veiled (people are not responding), it is veiled to those who are perishing (it is hidden), ⁴in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. [2 Corinthians 4:3-4]

You see, when you reject Christ and do not believe, God allows Satan to blind your heart and mind. It is the same thing: you cannot see anymore. It is veiled to those who are perishing. And this generation was perishing because they rejected Christ. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish." If you hear His word, do not harden your heart. Do not harden your heart. God came in human flesh because we are sinful, because we have fallen short. We have failed to meet His standards of righteousness. And Jesus Christ kept them perfectly. He lived a perfect life. He died for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead on the third day. And whoever will call upon the name of the Lord for salvation from sin will be saved. Will you do that before it is too late, before God lets you go in your own way in your hardness and you will not see anymore, you will not perceive anymore? What you have had and the conviction of the Word will be taken away from you. He who has will be given an abundance; he who does not have – it will be taken away. Do not reject it! Do not reject it.

Well, notice lastly as we conclude, Jesus shares the blessing upon those who do respond. Verse 16:

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“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.” The pronouncement of blessing upon the disciples – you are so blessed. You have Christ in your midst. So many prophets and righteous men desired this: to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing. And this multitude is rejecting it. Therefore I am going to let them go; but you are blessed, you are blessed. Brother and sister, if you are a true believer, you are blessed. We can see and hear the things of Christ. And I believe we have more truth about Christ than these disciples did. He was in their midst, but His truth was not fully unfolded yet. We have so much more about Christ. How much more blessed are we who are truly saved? Many prophets and righteous men (That is what we saw back in chapter 11): “If you receive a prophet or receive a righteous man, you see, that is an example of the Old Testament believers, right? There were those who spoke God’s Word; there were those who lived it out. They desired to see it. First Peter, chapter 1, if you want to turn there for a moment. First Peter 1, verse 10. This great salvation, a great salvation saving us from sin. God has caused us to born again to a living hope, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. A great salvation! In this, we rejoice! First Peter 1, verse 10:

¹⁰ As to this salvation (this great salvation), **the prophets who prophesied of the grace** (that is God’s favor towards us in Christ. We do not deserve it, but Christ came anyway) **that would come to you made careful search and inquiry,** ¹¹ **seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.** (It is the suffering on the cross and the glories to follow.) ¹² **It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.** (Angels peered down.) [**1 Peter 1:10-12**]

How could this be? God is saving these wicked people that He sent His Son to die for them. But blessed are your eyes and your ears because you hear. Do you consider yourself blessed because you can now know Christ and understand Him? We are very blessed, very blessed.

So why did Jesus speak in parables? To conceal truth from those who had rejected Him. And later on He explained the parable to reveal the truth to those who were in the kingdom. Where are you today? Where are you today? You are either a rejecter of the truth or a responder of the truth, and that determines your eternal destiny. It is appointed man once to die and then the judgment. And we are sinful. Christ will allow you to be convicted by His Word and there will be a point after you have rejected it (I do not know; no one knows. We cannot see your heart, but God is sovereign), He will turn Himself from you in your unbelief and He will allow Satan to harden your heart. Do not let it happen! Do not let it happen!

Where are you? You are either going to be saved by Jesus or you are going to stumble over Him. I shared in the beginning that it is eternally dangerous to hear God’s Word. But it is the only truth in which one can be saved. I exhort you today; do not harden your heart. That time will come where He

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allows you to go your own way. Maybe you have been sitting in church – you are church kids. You have heard the truth for a long time. You are just pressing it down. It is the church thing. There is a day where He will allow you to be hardened, and you will not be able to respond. Do not harden your hearts! Do not harden your hearts, kids! Adults, do not harden your hearts. God loves us so much He gave us His only begotten Son. Let Him till the soil of your heart, convict you of sin that you would receive the truth of the gospel and it would truly bring about new birth in your life.

I want to close and read in Isaiah, chapter 55. So turn with me to Isaiah 55. Jesus freely came among the Jews; He freely shared the truth concerning Himself, but there was a point where when they rejected it He turned His truth away from them. And he freely shared the truth with you today.

Isaiah 55:

¹Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. ²Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. ³Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live (open your ears up; open your heart up. Listen that you may live); And I will make an everlasting covenant with you... [Isaiah 55:1-3]

If you go down to verse 6:

⁶Seek the LORD while He may be found (this may be the last opportunity you have to respond); Call upon Him while He is near. ⁷Let the wicked forsake his way (that is repentance), And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. (You turn from your sin. I am sinful, Lord. I have blown it. I cannot stop. I am stuck in this. I hate it. It is wrong. And you turn to Christ to deliver you. He will save you. He says) ⁸For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. [Isaiah 55:6-11]

His Word is either going to confirm your judgment or it is going to bring forth your salvation because it points to Christ.

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Prayer

Father, You are a gracious God. You are a loving God. And I pray for anyone here who does not know You. I pray that they would not harden their hearts, that they would not clog their ears and close their eyes, that they would listen to the truth of your Word that they are sinful in Your sight, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that the wages of sin is death, that it is appointed man once to die and then the judgment. I pray that they would allow Your Word to break up the hardness of their hearts and they would receive the truth that Your Son Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that He was buried and rose from the dead, they would call upon the name of the Lord. "Lord Jesus, I am a wretched sinner; I need to be saved. I turn to you to save me. I believe You died for my sins." Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. And then, Father, I pray for those who have been saved. May we not forget our former purification from sins; may we not take it lightly. And may we thank You for what You have done. May we recognize how blessed we are because we see and hear that truth concerning Your Son. We are so blessed. May we not take it for granted. May we yearn for Your truth. May we desire it wholeheartedly. Thank you for Your Son who paid the price, who redeemed us from our sins. And it is in His name we pray.

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