



MONDAY 6 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 13:1-9

Plug In...

Jesus tells the crowd many things in parables (v.3). For the rest of chapter 13, Jesus will keep saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like...”. These parables teach the doctrine of the kingdom. Each parable is left hanging in the minds of His audience as to what it might mean. Only this first one Jesus explains, and only to His disciples (vv.18-23).

Chew It Over...

If you’ve been around the Bible for a while, then you’ve heard this parable quite a few times. Can we say it is the Bible’s most famous parable from Jesus (maybe next to the Good Samaritan)? With familiar pre-packaged stories and parables, we can read them and automatically default to whatever we were told in Sunday School or the like (it is the so-called curse of the familiar; or confirmation-bias). That may or may not be helpful. Not only for this parable, but for all familiar Bible passages, we must pause and ask, “Is that what it is saying?”, or if we’ve heard an explanation before, to come back and quiz: “Is that what it is getting at?” Matthew structures his Gospel with this pattern: a bit of narrative, then it stops to give in extended detail a sermon from Jesus. At five points the story stops to hear exactly what Jesus taught. The first is *The Sermon on the Mount* (chs. 5-6), next, *The Sermon on Mission* (ch. 10), and now a *Sermon on Parables*. Each sermon seems to explain in doctrine what we have just seen and witnessed in the narrative just told. Re-read

chapters 11-12 in one sitting and ask yourself, “How does this first parable resonate with what has been going on in the narratives just told?”

Prayer Suggestion

Lord as we do the hard work of stopping to read your word, ask questions of it, attempting to understand and apply it to our lives, please give us ears to hear and let us hear.



The Lakes

TUESDAY 7 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 13:9

Plug In...

The seed is spread, four different outcomes are depicted. Three arrive at the same dead-end destination, albeit by different routes and for different reasons. The fourth actually produces a crop!

Chew It Over...

Verse 9 is the climax of the parable. Often it is explained that there are three different types of people, all on a spectrum, so which *type* of seed are you? Or, the parable is applied to the Christian life, giving various levels of success and maturity. Well, maybe...

The first three destinations are the same: dead-ends! They together stage or setup the surprise of the final destination. Boom! It actually produces a crop. Really, only two groups are on view. A group that have ears and the group that doesn't.

What does Jesus pronounce on the 'eared' group? Does the way He pronounces remind you of other similar pronouncement phrases in the Bible?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank the Lord Jesus for creating within our own lives the ability to hear God's word and respond. Praise God for new creational hearts. Praise God that a kingdom harvest actually appears in this bleak world and that we are included. Ask the Lord to produce a bumper crop in your life.



WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 13:10-12

Plug In...

The disciples distinguish that Jesus speaks differently to the crowds than to them. Jesus answers their question by explicitly saying there are two groups (just like the parable demonstrated). There's the disciples, to whom the secrets of the kingdom of heaven are given. In contrast, there's 'them', the other group to whom parables seem to function as concealing the revelation (vv.13-15). Then Jesus notes that in order to be given more one first must possess something.

Chew It Over...

Jesus is again teaching what He prayed earlier that day, "*No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*" (11:25-27). The difference between the two groups is one group is divinely enabled to hear.

The back-story of Israel is one of hard-hearts and deaf ears. Next term we study this Israel in Deuteronomy. There, Moses says over and over to the second generation of Israelites, the problem the first generation had was they were stubborn and hard-hearted. He

implores the second generation to *listen* to God's words and obey. However, Moses will make clear that they won't listen until they are divinely enabled (Deuteronomy 30:1-10).

Here, Jesus is divinely enabling His disciples. Jesus is not simply telling stories, or giving a lecture. His very words make the kingdom come near to His disciples; He makes new creatures. Some words become so powerful they generate what is said when delivered by someone in authority (like a judge pronouncing 'guilty' or 'free to go'). Like God saying, 'Let there be light' and it is generated, so Jesus makes clear that He has given His disciples ears to hear – "let them hear". Jesus gives them 'knowledge of the secrets of heaven'. The knowledge is not so much informational content (although it is that), but 'knowledge' in the Bible primarily expresses intimate relationship (i.e. "Adam *knew* his wife"). To have knowledge of the kingdom is not to know about it, but to be related to it. Through Jesus' the disciples are now related (possess) the kingdom. They now will be given an abundance (everything).

Dive down deep, do you live deeply aware that to have Jesus is to have everything? What attitudes over the past week might betray that? When can you repent?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank God for mercifully and graciously unblocking our ears and softening our hearts. Thank God that He has given us listening ability. Ask the Lord that the fruit of this reality is indeed a hundred-fold. May we be given more listening, obedience, and the effects that come from all that.



THURSDAY 9 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 13:13-15

Plug In...

Jesus draws on Isaiah 6 to explain His parabolic teaching. The Hebrew of Isaiah 6 is more forceful than the NIV captures it. The Hebrew Old Testament has: "Make the heart of this people fat! And make their ears heavy, and their eyes shut lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and with their heart understand and convert and be healed." (Isaiah 6:10).

The context of Isaiah 6 shows Israel is already hard-hearted and under judgement (just read Isaiah 5 to see how stubborn they are). Now God commissions Isaiah to speak a message that confirms them in that judgement. Isaiah asks, "For how long, Lord?" (Isaiah 6:11). The LORD replies until there has been a complete wipe out so all that is left is a holy seed – as a stump in the land (Isaiah 6:11-13). There will be hope after that.

Chew It Over...

Jesus' words draw from Isaiah and are intense. First, remember Jesus is addressing Israel. Matthew's Gospel keeps showing Israel is in a bad place. Matthew keeps telling the next phase of Israel's story. Within this storyline, when would you say it looked like only a holy seed remained? When does even that seed get cut down too? What happens next?

Prayer Suggestion

Lord Jesus, again we see amongst all Israel you are the only faithful one that remained. You too, without sin, stepped into Israel, into our world, to be cut down. Cut down in our place so we might rise from the ashes again. You took the judgement that Israel had to take, you've risen as the new Israel. Thank you that anyone united to Christ is counted as Israel and inherits the promises. Thank you Jesus for including us within that inheritance.



FRIDAY 10 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 13:16-17

Plug In...

Once again Jesus confers blessing on a group of people (remember the Beatitudes at start of the Sermon on the Mount?). In a sea of unbelieving Israelites throughout history, only the prophets and a few who took the prophets' message seriously (the righteous) existed. This small group had faith in something God said would come, but this small bunch of disciples around Jesus actually saw its arrival. The disciples are privileged.

Chew It Over...

As Jesus pulls the disciples aside to explain the parable and why He chooses to speak in parables, what is the key thing Jesus stresses to the disciples? What other things could be stressed in the parable? Do you think those things move us closer to Jesus' emphasis or away?

We know the headings in bold in our Bible are not part of the inspired word of God, however, which title in bold do you think is the most helpful: *The Parable of the Four Soils* or *The Parable of the Sower*?

Prayer Suggestion

Thank God that you read this story like the disciples, even the disciple Matthew, came to read it. Speak words to Jesus now that express gratitude for the privilege He has conferred on you too.



WEEKEND 11-12 MARCH 2017

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 13:18-23 & Psalm 95

Plug In...

Jesus explicitly identifies the seed as the 'word of the kingdom' (v.19). In the first three responses to the word, the receiver actually cannot do anything with it because of extenuating circumstances. The evil one is against them, not giving them a chance. The second, is in a predicament for they have not depth, despite the initial joy. The third, internal and outside forces are too strong for this one. Again, the difference with the fourth is that they start with a native ability to understand – they seem to just absorb the seed and wallah! By now, we know by 'native' we mean 'new creation *native*'. God has switched a light on for this person. Their ability to absorb the seed is beyond themselves, it is a supernatural ability.

Chew It Over...

Foundations to understanding the doctrine of the kingdom have been taught by this parable. Jesus, here and only one other time, pulls His disciples aside to give explanation. This act does what He teaches. Jesus divinely enables them to understand and enter the kingdom of heaven. With the picture of a fruitful harvest, it is difficult to know if an individual is on view (i.e. they produce fruit) or this is just a collective image that there will be a harvest in contrast to every other field. Probably both. The subsequent explanation warns that not every individual that calls themselves a "Christian" turns out to be a Christian. For, each 'soil' *hears* the kingdom message and

seems to accept it for a time. More collectively, there is only one group in the world that receive the kingdom, it is the group Jesus gives ears to. This group is not everyone that goes to church, just like not everyone who was in Israel was Israel. This group are those who are in the kingdom, which of course are to be found within the church. It is possible that a person can be in the church, but not in the kingdom. The one who is in the kingdom should be in church. It is not Israel, not necessarily the church, but those in the kingdom that are part of the harvest. Their genuineness as this harvest group is revealed because they actually produce fruit. This ethical fruit has been a large theme of Matthew's Gospel: *produce fruit in keeping with repentance; judge a tree by its fruit; He who puts my words into practice will be in the kingdom.* Jesus' divine enabling is so that He produces a harvest; so that we produce ethical fruit (obedience to Jesus). The Bible teaches us that God is the first mover behind our heart responding. Nevertheless, from our perspective we still have responsibility, and it will test and prove our genuineness. Today if you hear His voice press in, don't turn away.

How much does this doctrine throw us back into prayer? How does belief in this doctrine of the kingdom correspond to prayer? No wonder the first request Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer is, "May your kingdom come, may your will be done".

Prayer Suggestion

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 5:9-13).