



The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Thirteen

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

Jesus embarked on teaching, initially the crowd and then just his own disciples, using seven parables to describe the Kingdom of Heaven. To the crowds he told the Parable of the Sower, i.e. various types of recipients in the church; the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds concerning the saved and the lost in the world, who will coexist until final judgement; the Parable of the Mustard Seed that speaks of how the Kingdom starts from small beginnings to extend to become the worldwide church; and finally the Parable of the Yeast, which shows how the Kingdom permeates within the individual believer but still spreads throughout the world silently through more and more individuals.

During this part of his discourse, Jesus explained that he taught in parables so that those who are called will be equipped by the Holy Spirit to comprehend his teaching will understand it, while it will remain a mystery to those who are not destined to understand and thereby come to saving faith. Jesus also explained the first parable to his disciples.

After this, Jesus went into a house to teach just his disciples but continued using parables. He first explained to them about the Parable of the Wheat, to ensure they fully comprehended what was going on around them in the world. He then gave three brief but important lessons in the Parable of the Lost Treasure to show that anyone could stumble into the Kingdom by God's grace, then the Parable of the Pearl, to show that seekers will recognise the Kingdom when they see it. In both cases, those who find treasure or a pearl will give up everything they have to be part of the Kingdom.

Since his disciples were drawn from fishing communities, the final Parable of the Net uses a familiar fishing analogy to show that God trawls in all sorts of fish, good and bad. These will be sorted at the final judgement; the good will go to eternal salvation and the bad to everlasting damnation.

Jesus concluded this passage of teaching by indicating that there will be new revelations about the Kingdom, as well as clarification of the known revelations that were given throughout the OT covenant period.

Jesus then left that place and travelled back to Nazareth, the town where he grew up, to teach in their synagogue and proclaim the Kingdom to those who thought they knew him. Since he was so well known to them as the carpenter's son they would not accept him and indeed took offence at his messianic claims.

VIII. Matthew 13:1-53 - Mysteries of the Messianic Kingdom Revealed in Parables (Third Discourse)

This is the third of Jesus' five major discourses, called the Parabolic Discourse because of its collection of Kingdom parables. The parables are a paradox, that is, there appears to be contradictions and yet all are true. A key part of this is that they reveal truth to those whom the Spirit enables and hides that same truth from those he does not. It has nothing to do with human will or capability but the sovereignty and will of God.

RT Kendall provides three principles for parables:

1. Not all parables point to the same truth.
2. Often a parable will have only one basic truth in mind.
3. Never try to make a parable stand on all four legs! That is, not every detail of a parable has to have a meaning or a doctrine built around it.

VIII.a Matthew 13:1-23 - The opening of the Parabolic Discourse

Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower with its various soils representing the state of the human heart to receive the seed, i.e. the Word of God (vv.3b-9). He then explains his purpose of speaking in parables (vv.10-17), before interpreting this first parable (vv.18-23).

VIII.a.i Matthew 13:1-9 - The Parable of the Sower

Galilee had two primary industries: fishing and farming. Jesus commences his discourse with the first of seven parables of the Kingdom, using a familiar agricultural analogy of a farmer sowing seed, representing the Word of God, onto different soil types, each representing different states of the human heart.

This is not technically the first parable in Matthew's Gospel for, as he concluded the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: **<<Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock>>** (Matthew 7:24), going on to tell a parable about a wise and a foolish builder.

Three things stand out in this parable:

1. It is easy to understand.
2. It is elementary.
3. It is explained by Jesus. Only two of them are and yet these still need some analysis.

No one ever claimed that Jesus' teaching was easy to understand or to follow: <<When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life;

the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life>> (John 6:60-63).

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

Matthew 13:1-2

That same day links the following discourse to the busy Sabbath day of confrontation, healings and teaching that is recorded in Matthew Chapter 12.

Went out of the house. The previous chapter had concluded with Jesus' teaching his disciples and with his family waiting outside the house to speak with him. Although it is not confirmed, many commentators believe this to have been Peter's home in Capernaum, where Jesus often stayed and taught.

Sat beside the lake refers to the Sea of Galilee. Sitting was the typical posture for teachers. Local tradition locates this discourse at the 'Cove of the Parables', a natural horseshoe-shaped amphitheatre with environmental acoustics that could have carried Jesus' voice over 300 feet or 91m from the boat to a crowd of hundreds on the shore. Jesus had taught in similar fashion early on in his ministry: <<*He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat*>> (Luke 5:3).



The Cove of Parables

The whole crowd stood on the beach. As was normal in the culture, the teacher sat and the congregation stood to hear the Word of God. Today, the tradition has been reversed, with the speaker often stood in a pulpit or on a stage, with the congregation sitting on seating ranging from wooden pews to comfortable chairs.

Ironically, one of Jesus' final lessons for his disciples came when he was stood on the beach and they were sat in a boat on the lake: <<Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They

answered him, 'No'>> (John 21:3-5). He went on to give them instructions and they caught a whole net full! A much overlooked and often ignored miracle.

³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow.

Matthew 13:3

Listen is a simple command, but one worthy of attention. Disciples need to do more than just read or hear God's Word; they need to do all they can to understand it, whether by attending bible study classes, spending time with other Christians or reading well-researched commentaries.

He told them many things in parables became Jesus' primary means of communicating truth through a narrative analogy in order to teach a moral or spiritual lesson. A parable may be defined as a simple story that illustrates a profound truth. Telling parables was Jesus' main way of helping his followers to grasp spiritual truths. His parables produce very different results in different people: they hide truth from the crowd (v.2), while they communicate truth to those whom the Holy Spirit has enabled.

Although referred to as 'The Parable of the Sower', the sower may appear to be the least important component, for he is only referred to once. Mark 4:14 and Luke 8:4 also confirm this and this continues to be the case in Jesus' explanation of the story which he gives in vv.18-23.

It is often taken to refer to Christ; however, the sower is also any person who is called to share the Gospel, whether they are a pastor, teacher, evangelist, prophet or just a disciple sharing the good news with a family member, friend, colleague or even a stranger. Therefore, the sower is an important component in that he or she must ensure what is being shared is accurate and based solely on Scripture.

The focus here is on the various kinds of soil onto which the sower scatters his seed. The types of soil are symbolic for the state of the human heart. Therefore, the success of the sowing is wholly dependent on the state, attitude and condition of the heart of those that hear, assuming of course the sowing reflects the true nature of the Gospel of Jesus. Once the message is heard and accepted, a person must not leave any entrance into their heart to enable Satan to take from them what they have received and, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it: <<***We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away***>> (Hebrews 2:1).

It is quite deliberate that Jesus should talk about sowing seed in the first two parables, for that is what he came to do for his own disciples. The seeds he sowed were Kingdom principles, teaching about the Father and the Spiritual Kingdom of Heaven. He knew that it would take time for the seeds to grow and indeed, even after three years of teaching, his death and resurrection, the disciples had not even grasped the key point of this teaching, for they asked him: <<***Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?***>> (Acts 1:6b), referring to a temporal kingdom like that ruled by David and Solomon, expecting him to expel the Roman occupying armies from their land.

This was the long held view in Judaism for the Messiah and the apostles were no exception. Therefore, they were happy to hear about the Kingdom, for their interpretation initially was a different one from that which Jesus was speaking of.

In a similar way, they had misinterpreted other prophecies of the true Kingdom: <<*The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts*>> (Haggai 2:9). The whole of the Sermon on the Mount had contradicted this, as did all of Jesus' Kingdom teaching, yet it would be several more years before his disciples started to fully grasp what he had been telling them from the outset.

⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Matthew 13:4-7

And as he sowed. The man here scatters the seed in all directions. This is what John Calvin referred to as the indiscriminate offer of the Gospel. Only God knows who the elect are. Disciples are called to share the Gospel with everyone they have an opportunity to share it with and not try to judge people in order to determine who should hear it and who should not. However, this parable is primarily about those inside the church, both those who are saved and those who or not, including those who may have undergone baptism and yet had never truly accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

The seeds are the second key part of the message for it represents the Word of God or the Gospel message that is to be planted in the hearts and minds of all who will listen and hear. After all, faith comes from hearing the Word of God: <<*So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ*>> (Romans 10:17).

The four soil types listed each represent a positive reception of the Gospel but with differing outcomes. Essentially, this is a parable about those inside the church and not in the world or society generally. It should also be accepted that there will be people who simply reject the message with no further thought, which also applies to those who attend church for reasons other than to serve God through Jesus.

Seeds fell on the path. As seed was scattered in all directions while the sower walked up and down the field, some would fall accidentally on the hard paths that surrounded the field.

The path, rocky ground, and among thorns are differing heart conditions for those who receive the Word. They will be explained by Jesus in vv.18-23 and commented on then.

When Jesus described those who hear but from whom the devil comes and snatches the Word away, or those who receive the Word with joy but have no root, and those whose seed fell among thorns and was choked, the three types mentioned here, he was talking about those who heard outwardly but not inwardly. They receive the Word with their minds but not truly in their hearts.

⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Matthew 13:8

Other seeds fell on good soil. This refers to an open and receptive human heart. The Word is received with joy, accepted and a soul is saved for all eternity.

Brought forth grain. Once a person has accepted Jesus as the Lord of their life, there will be a process of change that will result in Kingdom fruit.

Some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Typical agricultural yields ranged from about fivefold to fifteen fold, with a tenfold return considered a good crop, though some historical reports tell of extraordinary yields up to a hundredfold: <<*Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he became very wealthy*>> (Genesis 26:12-13). This is only possible supernaturally through the work of the Holy Spirit.

⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 13:9

Let anyone with ears listen is a call to everyone who would wish to hear and accept the teachings of Jesus in their hearts rather than just with their ears, irrespective of whether it makes comfortable listening or not. Jesus had used this call before after commending the work and character of John the Baptist: <<*Let anyone with ears listen!*>> (Matthew 11:15).

VIII.a.ii Matthew 13:10-17 - The Purpose of the Parables

Jesus taught in parables so that the truth about the Kingdom of Heaven would be revealed to those whom the Holy Spirit enabled, yet would remain hidden from all others. God's sovereignty decides who understands and who does not, who is saved and who is not. Some people have said this seems rather unfair, Paul disagrees: <<*What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'* So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy>> (Romans 9:14-16).

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' ¹¹ He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.'

Matthew 13:10-11

Secrets is the plural of the Greek word *mystērion*, which can mean mystery as well as secret. The mysteries of how the Kingdom of Heaven would operate are revealed to the disciples: <<*Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given”*>> (Matthew 13:11), but withheld from the spiritually unresponsive crowd. In particular, these secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven explained its partial and preliminary manifestations in Jesus’ day as it was breaking into the world in advance of its full and final appearing at the end of the age.

God let his disciples in on a secret, i.e. that he has secrets! God could keep a secret, but he also chooses to reveal them to whom he wills. The parables were designed to unfold secrets to those whom he wanted to hear them and to hide secrets from those he didn’t: <<*Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are discerned spiritually*>> (1 Corinthians 2:14). Even those revealed about Jesus through the OT prophets were not understood until after they occurred, the best kept secret being that his Christ would actually come and die in order to redeem his people.

¹² For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³ The reason I speak to them in parables is that “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.”

Matthew 13:12-13

Those who have refers to those to whom the Spirit reveals the secrets of the Kingdom. Their knowledge and spiritual gifts will be increased so that they will have an abundance; great sufficiency to enable them to undertake their calling by God.

What they have will be taken away. Those who fail to have sufficient faith in Jesus as the Messiah will lose whatever spiritual insight they may have had so that they will then not be able to understand the teaching of the Gospel.

Seeing they do not perceive. God sovereignly uses the parables to either harden a person’s heart, so that he or she will be unable to respond (v.15), or to elicit the positive response of coming to Jesus, asking for an explanation, and accepting his message (v.10).

Hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand. In a similar vein, they hear what Jesus is saying but they are not really paying attention, nor are their minds and hearts open to receive and perceive what is being said to them.

These were familiar themes in OT prophecies: <<*But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear*>> (Deuteronomy 29:4), <<*Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear*>> (Jeremiah 5:21), and: <<*Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, who have ears to hear but do not hear*>> (Ezekiel 12:2).

14 With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

**“You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.**

**15 For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn –
and I would heal them.”**

Matthew 13:14-15

Fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. Matthew continues with his fulfilment formula, refer to comments made on Matthew 1:22. Since this quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10 describes the hard-heartedness of Israel, its citation here, taken from the Septuagint or Greek version of the OT, emphasises the fact that Jesus spoke in parables to outsiders as a form of prophetic warning. Jesus warned of the serious consequences for all, both Gentiles and Jews, who will not open their hearts to him. And yet, there is always an opportunity for repentance in each and every generation, i.e. a person needs to turn – and I would heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

Matthew 13:16-17

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. All disciples need to comprehend that they are blessed by God that they have been given the capability to understand and respond to the Gospel. This does not make them any better than those who fail to respond, they just need to be thankful that they have done so.

Many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see. The OT is full of people who lived faithful lives before God, knowing that this day would come at some point: <<*Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad*>> (John 8:56), <<*All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth*>> (Hebrews 11:13), and: <<*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you,*

in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look!>> (1 Peter 1:10-12). They naturally would have wished it to be in their day. For the generation of disciples listening to Jesus it was a reality and they needed to be thankful for what they were able to witness. There are many disciples in the church today who would wish they too had lived in Jesus' day, or perhaps that he had come during their lifetime. What they perhaps fail to understand is that they are even more blessed because the Gospel has spread even wider to billions of people, which was beyond the comprehension of even men like Peter, John and Paul.

VIII.a.iii Matthew 13:18-23 - The Parable of the Sower Explained

Jesus provides a full explanation of the first parable in order to give his disciples insight as to how his parables were structured and how they should be interpreted by those to whom the truth is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

The sower in the parable primarily represents Jesus but in a secondary sense every faithful preacher of the Gospel. The various soils represent the condition of human hearts. The inhospitable hearts in the parable gradually become more receptive from indifferent to opportunistic to very interested, but nevertheless remain preoccupied with the cares of their present life in rebellion against God's true purposes. The good soil represents a consistently attentive and accepting heart.

¹⁸ 'Hear then the parable of the sower.

Matthew 13:18

Hear then. Jesus explains the parable of the sower in response to the disciples' receptive hearts that led them to ask him for clarification (v.10). Refer also to comments made on Luke 8:11-15.

¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.

Matthew 13:19

The seed in the parable (vv.3-9) represents the word of the Kingdom, i.e. the Gospel of the Kingdom. All of Jesus' seeds are good, so the emphasis is on the various types of soil (vv.19-23).

The evil one refers to Jesus' main adversary Satan, who seeks to maintain a hold on anyone he can in order to keep them from turning back to God: *<<In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God>>* (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Sown on the path refers to hearts that are hardened or have been blinded by Satan, similar to those of most of the scribes and Pharisees. It is not that this person rejects the Gospel; they simply fail to comprehend it and grasp its true significance. The devil then snatches away what it is they have received in their

heart, robbing them of this chance of salvation. The enemy is always trying to supplant what God might do in a person's life. That's the way Jesus put it. Jesus made it clear that such a person is not saved.

²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.

Matthew 13:20-21

Sown on rocky ground depicts a heart that is immediately receptive but shallow so that the Gospel never takes root and thus fails to gain sufficient strength of conviction, for although they may endure for a while, it does not last and at the first sign of trouble or persecution that will come into a believer's life, as confirmed by Paul: <<*Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*>> (2 Timothy 3:12), their conviction fails them. Such a person immediately falls away from the faith, showing that they were not truly saved.

Immediately receives it with joy. This is a reaction to the Gospel that is enthusiastic and compliant. On hearing the message, some people will react with excitement and want to make an immediate commitment. Perhaps because this type of person reacts so quickly, they have not thought through the implications of their decision. They could be excited by what they've heard because they think it will be the answer to a personal problem they've been dealing with. Sometimes people will respond to the Gospel by coming forward at a church meeting and giving their life to Christ, but after that day they are not seen again. It doesn't necessarily mean that they were insincere, but they made a quick profession of faith that turned out to be superficial.

There are many top speakers that initiate altar calls as a means to respond to a message. It is all too easy for people to get caught up in the hype of good worship and an exciting promise of eternal salvation, encouraged by their Christian friends' own excitement, and respond to such a call. There has to be good follow up by the church to help to guide these people to a place to understand what it is they are responding to. Too frequently they wake up the next morning and wonder what it was all about.

²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.

Matthew 13:22

The seed sown among thorns likewise yields nothing, choked out by a heart weighed down with the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, or the lure of wealth. There are those who react positively to the Gospel but allow the message to be stifled by the many competing worries, pressures and desires: <<*But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.*>>

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains>> (1 Timothy 6:9-10). This need not just apply to wealth but social status or a desire to be accepted or recognised. These people don't have a superficial reaction to the Gospel but gradually fall away over time as they allow many other concerns and influences to crowd in.

It should be noted that, although the people who fall into the above categories are not saved at that time, it does not mean that there will not come a time in their life when they will be able to come to true saving faith and persevere.

²³ But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.'

Matthew 13:23

The good soil depicts the heart that has been prepared to receive the Gospel, yielding an abundant harvest according to individual potential. This is the only one of the four categories that has received true saving faith and will receive their reward for doing so.

VIII.b Matthew 13:24-35 - Further parables told to the crowds

Jesus presents the parables of the wheat and the weeds (vv.24-30), the mustard seed (vv.31-32), and the yeast or leaven (v.33).

VIII.b.i Matthew 13:24-30 - The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

The primary purpose of this parable is to show that God allows both good and evil to co-exist in the world. Therefore, unlike the Parable of the Sower, this is not about the church but about society in general. Although his purpose for allowing this situation is not apparent, the reader can be assured that appropriate judgement will come upon all at the end of the age. What is also clear is the reality of eternal heaven and eternal hell.

²⁴ He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;

Matthew 13:24

The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to. Jesus draws on various common experiences to describe the arrival and activity of the Kingdom. Jesus will use the similar phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven is like', giving six other comparisons in this chapter. It is a theme he will return to in later parables: <<*For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves*>> (Matthew 18:23), <<*For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard*>> (Matthew 20:1), <<*The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son*>> (Matthew 22:2), and: <<*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom*>> (Matthew 25:1).

²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” ²⁸ He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” ²⁹ But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’

Matthew 13:25-30

Jesus will explain this parable in vv.36-43 and most of the comments will be made there. Unlike the Parable of the Sower, which is essentially about the saved and unsaved in the church, this parable refers to the world or society in general and not the church, i.e. it helps to explain the role of the church in the world and looks at issues of common grace as well as saving grace.

While everybody was asleep, an enemy came. The enemy here is the devil and some commentators like to see this as a call for the church to remain awake and watchful at all times: <<*Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into*>> (Matthew 24:42-43). Many others see it as a simple reference to the covert way Satan operates.

Weeds is the plural of Greek *zizanon*, found only here in the NT, and are probably darnel, a weedy rye grass with poisonous black seeds, which resembles wheat in its early growth but is easily distinguished from it at maturity. Any attempt to gather the weeds would only endanger the wheat, because the roots of the weeds would be intertwined with those of the wheat.

Let both of them grow together. God allows both believers and unbelievers to coexist in the world until the Day of Judgment. Refer to comments made on v.38.

Bind them in bundles to be burned is reminiscent of the wheat and the chaff: <<*His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire*>> (Matthew 3:12).

VIII.b.ii Matthew 13:31-32 - The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Jesus teaches a profound truth that the Kingdom of Heaven would start in an insignificant, almost unperceived way but that it would grow into a global church that was completely beyond the imagination of his first listeners and is still capable of much greater growth today.

³¹ He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

Matthew 13:31-32

The remarkable contrast between the small beginnings of a mustard seed and its final, large mustard plant had earned it proverbial status in Judaism, which Jesus would use to good effect in teaching his disciples that everything is possible by faith: <<*He said to them, 'Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there", and it will move; and nothing*



A typical mustard seed

will be impossible for you'>> (Matthew 17:20), including the ability to totally forgive someone, no matter how much or how often they have wronged a person: <<*And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, "I repent", you must forgive.'* The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' The Lord replied, 'If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you>> (Luke 17:4-6). It was the smallest of all agricultural seeds in Palestine.

Although the concept of total forgiveness is not so apparent in this parable, it remains a Kingdom principle that applies to planting small mustard seeds. When someone is wronged and they genuinely say in their heart, 'I forgive them, God please do not hold it against them but bless them', then get on with their life, a mustard seed has been planted that God can water and grow, as noted by Paul: <<*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth*>> (1 Corinthians 3:6).

A key point for Jesus' disciples at that time and today is not to be discouraged by small beginnings: <<*For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. 'These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth'*>> (Zechariah 4:10). This might refer to a new church plant with just a few members, a new ministry that is only meeting the needs of a small number of people, or even the rate of growth in an individual's journey of faith. Indeed, another reason Jesus told this parable was to show how God can take the most unlikely person and turn them into a sovereign vessel, no matter where they thought they were at on their journey.

This is also an important parable because it shows that God can take the most unpromising situation and turn it into triumph and glory, starting with what must have seemed a quite insignificant, almost routine event, that of the

crucifixion of a Jewish trouble-maker from the point of view of some people to something that changed the world and has touched the lives of billions of people.

Someone took and sowed in his field. Jesus' point here is that the process had already begun with God sending his Son and that the Kingdom of Heaven was now a reality on earth.

Becomes a tree. The mustard tree grows to a height of 8 to 12 feet or 2.4-3.7m. Israel was not prepared for an insignificant beginning to the Kingdom of God, so this image would have shocked the listeners. However, a key aspect of becoming a disciple of Christ is to become continually led out of one's comfort zone, whether that is to serve in new ways, face new challenges, or receive fresh revelation.

Jesus' teaching is once again profound. As well as showing that the church will be significant in comparison to its humble beginnings, he did not liken it to one of the mighty cedars of Lebanon. However, big the church may become, it will never match the grandeur of some other institutions in the world, for it was never God's intention that everyone could be saved, for he knew the hearts of people, even though he desired that they would be: *<<This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth>> (1 Timothy 2:3-4).*

The birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. God gave King Nebuchadnezzar a similar vision of the great kingdom of Babylon: *<<Upon my bed this is what I saw; there was a tree at the centre of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew great and strong, its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the ends of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful, its fruit abundant, and it provided food for all. The animals of the field found shade under it, the birds of the air nested in its branches, and from it all living beings were fed>> (Daniel 4:10-12),* although it would only be a shadow of the greater Kingdom to come. Universalism may not be a reality but the parable confirms that the Kingdom does have more than sufficient provision for all who are called to be there for eternity: *<<In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?>> (John 14:2).*

VIII.b.iii Matthew 13:33 - The Parable of the Yeast

Yeast or leaven is an agent used to make dough rise. It only takes a very small amount to produce a large batch of bread. It works silently and mostly goes unnoticed and yet the results are dramatic. Jesus applies this analogy to the way the newly planted Kingdom will spread and grow across the whole world, silently in the hearts and minds of people, changing them forever.

³³ He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

Matthew 13:33

Jesus uses the metaphor of yeast or leaven, which usually has a negative connotation in Scripture: <<*Jesus said to them, 'Watch out, and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees'*>> (Matthew 16:6), and: <<*Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed*>> (1 Corinthians 5:6-7), to symbolise the positive, hidden permeation of the Kingdom of Heaven within an individual believer.

The Kingdom of Heaven is indeed active, although not fully visible to the world, because it begins with an inner transformation of the believer's heart and mind, for: <<*A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough*>> (Galatians 5:9). It should manifest itself to the world as the believer's fruit works itself out within their community usually as part of a local church. It can also be applied to the spirituality of the church, which works in a similar way to the individual, for it is the silent work of the Holy Spirit that continues mostly unnoticed: <<*for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*>> (Philippians 2:13).

Three measures of flour was probably about 50 pounds or 39 litres, enough to have produced sufficient bread to feed one hundred people.

Yeast cells produce substances called enzymes. So when the yeast is added to bread dough, one enzyme goes to work on the flour, changing the starch in it into sugar. Another enzyme then takes over and changes the sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide, so that the CO₂ spreads through the dough in the form of bubbles. The dough is then placed in a dark, warm place for the fermentation to take place before going into an oven. As the dough bakes into bread, the heat causes the alcohol to evaporate and the bubbles to break. This leaves the tiny air pockets in the final bread or cake, making it light and fluffy.

Since yeast was not available in manufactured form in the 1st Century but existed only as single cells floating in the air, then women used to produce the same effect with what they called leaven by taking a piece of old dough, leaving it in the sun to go mouldy, attracting yeast from the air. This was called leaven and was then mixed with a new larger batch of dough.

The original mixture can be created by mixing flour, salt, sugar and a source of starch such as potato water, and letting yeast cells in the air supply the enzymes!

Although this was very familiar to people in Jesus' day, the actual process was quite mystical and the exponential growth it produced seemed to be a miracle from God, providing an abundance of food from a limited resource.

That yeast is alien to flour and is introduced artificially, and originally without people knowing what was being added, also represents the Kingdom and what happens to a believer when they first accept Jesus as their saviour and the Holy Spirit enters to do his work, for like the yeast to the flour, the Holy Spirit is not native to man but permeates the entire being once he has been allowed

to enter the heart, just as the yeast has to be kneaded into the dough. Much of the work occurs during the secretive fermentation process. Due to a small amount of faith, the Spirit is allowed into a person and grows into an abundance of goodness.

VIII.b.iv Matthew 13:34-35 - The Use of Parables

Jesus spoke in parables to reveal the secrets of the Kingdom to those whom the Holy Spirit enabled but they remained a mystery to everyone else.

³⁴ Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. ³⁵ This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet:

‘I will open my mouth to speak in parables;

I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.’

Matthew 13:34-35

The quotation Jesus used here is from Psalm 78:2 showing that his use of parables was not arbitrary but preordained and notified to the people through the Scriptures to aid their understanding of Christ’s authentic message.

VIII.c Matthew 13:36-53 - Explanations and parables told to the disciples

Jesus explains the parable of the wheat and weeds (vv.36-43), and then gives the disciples the parables of the hidden treasure (v.44), the costly pearl (vv.45-46), the dragnet (vv.47-48), and the householder’s treasure (vv.51-52).

VIII.c.i Matthew 13:36-43 - Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

Jesus told the crowd the Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (vv.24-30), where God allows the saved wheat to coexist in the world along with the unsaved weeds, those planted by the devil. He now gives a private interpretation of that parable to his disciples.

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’

Matthew 13:36

He left the crowds marks a transition in the account. Jesus moves from telling parables generally to the crowd to focusing on teaching just his disciples in the privacy of the house, accepted by many to be Peter’s home in Capernaum. This enabled him also to give an explanation of one of the parables to them. This is not the only time that even his closest followers had to ask for an explanation of one of his parables: <<*But Peter said to him, ‘Explain this parable to us’*>> (Matthew 15:15).

³⁷ He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;
³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one,

Matthew 13:37-38

The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. It is God, through Christ, who does the all the saving and not the church or members of it. The good seed here represents those who are saved, i.e. God's elect, the children of the kingdom, rather than the Word of God as it did in the Parable of the Sower.

The field is the world. The parable describes the activity of God's Kingdom in the world rather than within the church. The enemies of the Kingdom are the children of Satan, those under his influence rather than the fallen angels or human beings who actively followed him: <<*You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies*>> (John 8:44), referred to here as the weeds, and will be permitted by God to coexist with the sons of the Kingdom, i.e. the good seed, throughout this age.

³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

Matthew 13:39

The enemy who sowed them is the devil. Satan has been allowed to place his people or more accurately to influence people in every area of human life: governments, education, business, health care and science, anywhere that gives him influence and power. Yet God shows common grace on all of mankind to allow many of these institutions to work for the benefit of all humankind. However, it should come as no surprise when these areas of society start to show the influence of Satan in what they do, even though the people doing his work are not necessarily bad themselves. It is not the role of the church to remove Satan's influence from these places, a political act in itself, although they should do when he infiltrates the church. What the church is to do is to continue to proclaim the Gospel, and to be salt and light to all mankind so that some of them may be saved.

The harvest is the end of the age. The devil's agents and, sadly those duped by him, will be dealt with at Jesus' Second Coming: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16), or more explicitly for judgement: <<*For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done*>> (Matthew 16:27). At that time his angels will take the weeds to be burned up with fire, not destroyed but taken to a place of everlasting torment and pain.

Matthew 13:39-40

The harvest refers to the judgment that will follow the Son of Man's return at the end of the age to establish his Kingdom in its fully realised form. John saw this in his vision: <<*Another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, 'Use your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe'*>> (Revelation 14:15).

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:41-42

They will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers. This confirms that evil and sin will remain a reality until the very end and that it will be his angels and not his church that root it out. Their role remains consistent throughout, to teach the repentance of all sin and to oppose evil through the proclamation of the Gospel, including living lives that represent what is said.

The furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth is Jesus' typical description of eternal judgment in Matthew's Gospel and can also be found in v.50, Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 24:51 and 25:30. This does not indicate destruction or oblivion but clearly indicates the permanence and intensity of everlasting punishment that will face those who did not choose to accept Christ's call.

⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 13:43

The righteous will shine like the sun, thus reflecting in some lesser way the *Shechinah*, i.e. the brightness of the glory of God: <<*the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him*>> (Exodus 34:35), <<*Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever*>> (Daniel 12:3), <<*And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white*>> (Matthew 17:2), and: <<*Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven*>> (1 Corinthians 15:49).

Let anyone with ears listen was commented on in v.9.

VIII.c.ii Matthew 13:44-50 - Three Parables

Jesus concludes his third discourse with three further short parables. The first two, which relate to hidden treasure and a pearl respectively, appear to be very similar but there are some distinctive and interesting differences to explore.

In the final parable, Jesus uses a fishing analogy showing how effective it is to trawl with a net in order to catch large numbers of fish, i.e. souls for the Kingdom.

⁴⁴ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matthew 13:44

Treasure is often hidden in a field, since formal banks did not exist, and the ‘bankers’ in: <<*Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest*>> (Matthew 25:27), were money-changers who exchanged currency and also seemed to have loaned money at interest, something not permitted for a Jew to charge to a fellow Jew: <<*If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them*>> (Exodus 22:25).

Buys that field does not suggest earning one’s salvation; instead, the parable emphasises the supreme value of the hidden treasure, i.e. the Kingdom of Heaven, which is worth far more than any sacrifice one could make to acquire it, that is, he goes and sells all that he has.

The key points to this parable are that a man, who was not a specialist in treasure, clearly not wealthy and who was not seeking for anything in particular, accidentally stumbled upon the treasure but when he did find it, he recognised it for what it was, sold all his possessions to raise the money to buy the field in order to have rights to the treasure, whereas a dishonourable man would simply have stolen it from the field. In other words, the man was not seeking God, stumbled upon him by hearing the Gospel, recognised and accepted him, and then died to self in order to enter the Kingdom. It does not indicate that the man bought his salvation, nor does a person have to sell all their possessions in order to come to Christ, that would be missing the point, for it is about willingly surrendering one’s self to Christ, not one’s possessions.

Another aspect that would have been strange to the ears of his early listeners, who expected the kingdom to be restored to the nation of Israel, was that it could come to an individual; that is its primary purpose, to transform individual lives through the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through each person.

⁴⁵ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:45-46

Unlike the man who stumbled upon the hidden treasure (v.44), this merchant was an expert in specific treasure and searched diligently for the fine pearls. But when he found the one pearl of great value, the Kingdom of Heaven, his reaction was the same: he sacrificed all that he had and bought it.

The Greek phrase translated as of great value is used only once more in the NT: <<*Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume*>> (John 12:3), thus illuminating that account even more.

Although the main themes of this parable and the parable of the hidden treasure are similar, there are contrasts in the content. The parable of the fine pearl refers to a merchant, or businessman, while the parable of the hidden treasure refers to a poorer person, perhaps a labourer. The parable of the fine pearl refers to someone who is seeking, perhaps a devout Jew originally but it can be applied to anyone today who senses there is a higher being, whereas the parable of the hidden treasure describes someone who wasn't looking for anything but who simply stumbled upon hidden treasure. One was only passive in seeking a relationship with God, while the other was actively seeking him.

The parable of the fine pearl refers to an expert who was looking for just that – fine pearls; he knew exactly what he wanted. The parable of the hidden treasure describes a person who was not an expert in anything, as far as we know. The parable of the fine pearl shows one man looking for pearls and he finds that one pearl of infinite value, the true pearl he really sought. The parable of the hidden treasure shows a man who simply found hidden treasure. He would have been glad to have found anything at all in that field. The parable of the fine pearl alludes to a search for a special relationship with God, not necessarily finding Christ the Messiah.

Jesus was talking only to His disciples when he told this parable, but in earlier parables, he was addressing everybody. The message of the parable of the fine pearl is aimed at someone who already loves the Lord – a person who has come to know God and is seeking a special relationship with him. Today, this might be aimed at someone who is knowledgeable of the Word; perhaps even a pastor teacher, trained in Greek and theology, yet still needs to seek diligently for that special relationship with God. No one should ever simply be comfortable in their relationship with God but should hunger to know more of him.

It should be noted that God is sovereign. While some people just stumble into an intimate relationship with God, others have to search diligently, perhaps for a whole lifetime, before they finally discover the one true pearl. That's just the way it is. Believers should rejoice for those who find God and continue to persevere in their own walk with God, no matter where they are in that relationship. The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard shows that some are called to work all day long, while others receive the same reward for just putting in the last couple of hours. Such is the will of God and it can only be accepted as such.

Perhaps the final conclusion to make over the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl is that it is God who is actually doing the seeking! Such is his desire to be in a relationship with those he has called to serve him.

⁴⁷ 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the

bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:47-50

The parable is about the sovereign right of Christ over all people. Despite all of life's pleasures and worries, only one thing will ultimately count for anything - is a person saved or not; where will they spend eternity?

Jesus' message would have come as a shock to his Jewish disciples who thought salvation was theirs by birthright but were here told that only some would be saved. More than that, they find that they are in the same net as the unclean Gentiles, some of whom were good fish as well. What does this message say about those people in the church today who are not truly saved?

A net, This parable uses the Greek word that is translated as dragnet. This indicates that the Kingdom does not use a line to catch one soul at a time, nor a small net that may pull in a few that are near the shoreline or surface, i.e. a specific type perhaps those searching for God. A dragnet would be anchored at one point, perhaps on shore but usually to one boat that is anchored, while another boat would drag the net around in a wide arc until it returned to the anchor point, trawling over wide area to the very bottom of the water and catching everything in its path. That would include all types of fish, crustaceans, water mammals and any debris that was in the water. Such are those that are drawn toward the Kingdom, only to be sorted later.

Caught fish of every kind. As indicated, the Kingdom embraces all sorts of people in its net, taken from all types of backgrounds, both genders and different types of sexual orientation, from different cultures, ethnic, social and faith groups. Those who accept the Gospel and have the Kingdom of Heaven within them are charged with somehow impacting on all the others in the net, so that they too will accept the Gospel.

They sat down. In 1st Century Jewish culture, the men would sit down when they had some issues of importance to contemplate, debate seriously, and finally make a decision upon. This indicates that ultimately it will be God who judges all people, i.e. collect the good fish and throw the bad away. It demonstrates that it will not be some arbitrary decision making process but one that is carefully considered, for God is a just judge.

The parable speaks of two types of fish only: good and bad. Good does not refer to some inner goodness, morality or worthiness; it refers to those who have the imputed righteousness of Christ. Good fish, i.e. true believers who are eternally saved, are determined as those who have placed their trust and faith in the blood of Jesus that was shed for all on the Cross.

Put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. Various fish were considered bad and unclean: <<*These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the streams – such you may eat. But anything in the seas or the streams that does*

not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and among all the other living creatures that are in the waters – they are detestable to you and detestable they shall remain. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall regard as detestable. Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you>> (Leviticus 11:9-12).

Evil will not be totally removed from the world until the end of the age.

The angels are given the task of sorting through those who are caught and God will judge them. It is not for believers to judge others in order to assess who is in or out of the Kingdom. It is the role of the angels to lead the good into eternal heaven and the bad into eternal hell or everlasting doom. Hell is not a temporary place for a short term punishment before being allowed into heaven through a back door as some suggest it to be.

Throw them into the furnace of fire indicates the reality of hell. It may not sit comfortably with those who see only the loving kindness of their creator God, who came to die for all of mankind and yet will see his own children suffer for all eternity. Ultimately, he would not be a holy and righteous God if he were not to punish unrepented sin; he will punish the unrepentant in a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, which shows that hell is not a place for final annihilation but is just as eternal as heaven.

Eternal heaven and hell are realities and those who go to hell will not be obliterated nor will they eventually go to heaven. Once in hell, always in hell, for the fires of hell are never extinguished as they cannot satisfy God's justice. Yet a single drop of Jesus' blood, accepted by faith for what it represents, cleanses all sin and satisfies the righteous wrath of God.

VIII.c.iii Matthew 13:51-53 - Treasures New and Old

The Parabolic Discourse ends with the disciples claiming to have understood the teaching, which they probably did at a human level. Jesus then indicates there is still new revelation of the Kingdom to come from God, as well as further revelation about what is already known, the new and the old treasure.

⁵¹ 'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.'⁵² And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'⁵³ When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.

Matthew 13:51-53

Have you understood, yes. True disciples grow in understanding through Jesus' teaching: <<*and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*>> (Matthew 28:20). Although the disciples confirm their understanding, it is unlikely they had more than a superficial understanding of the true spiritual Kingdom realities that Jesus was referring to, for even on his last evening with them they admitted: <<*We do*

not know what he is talking about>> (John 16:18b). Even today the best of biblical scholars struggle to fully interpret what Jesus truly means.

They are like the man who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old, in that they understand both the ‘new’ revelation from Jesus and how it fulfils the ‘old’ covenantal promises in the OT.

IX Matthew 13:54-16:20 - The Identity of the Messiah Revealed

This passage of Matthew’s Gospel marks a major new emphasis in his narrative, as Jesus’ messianic identity is increasingly clarified.

IX.a Matthew 13:54-14:12 - Prophet(s) without honour

Just like Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah, Jesus is rejected by his own people when he returns to Nazareth (vv.54-58); John the Baptist is beheaded by Herod Antipas (Matthew 14:1-12), an event that prefigures Jesus’ own execution.

IX.a.i Matthew 13:54-58 - The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

When Jesus returned to the people who had known him all of his life, he received a cool reception because they knew him to be the carpenter’s son, yet he now came teaching them things of great wisdom which did not sit with their previous knowledge of him. They found this revelation to be offensive and rejected him.

These accounts of breaking traditional ties frame the kingdom parables (Matthew 12:46-13:58), forcefully illustrating the message of those parables: the kingdom comes in an obscure way like a mustard seed, and only those with the eyes of faith will recognise it. How could anyone believe that God had stepped into history in the person of a boy who had grown up in their own community?

⁵⁴ **He came to his home town and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power?’**

Matthew 13:54

Although Capernaum had become Jesus’ new home during his Galilæan ministry: <<*He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali*>> (Matthew 4:13), his home town is Nazareth, the village of his family and where he spent his childhood, refer to comments made on Matthew 2:23. Perhaps he is responding to a request from his mother and brothers to return home who were waiting outside the house he was teaching in at the end of the previous chapter.

Luke refers to a similar visit, in which Jesus announced the start of his messianic ministry whilst teaching the people in their synagogue: <<*When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has*

anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'>> (Luke 4:16-21). Since Luke tends to group events thematically rather than chronologically, it seems likely that he combined two separate events.

⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?'

Matthew 13:55-56

Is not this the carpenter's son? Since they thought they knew Jesus' human roots, the people of Nazareth assumed he cannot be anything special. He was a home town son making fantastic claims about himself.

The people among whom Jesus had grown up were unprepared to embrace his wisdom and miraculous powers. In a town of probably five hundred or fewer inhabitants, everyone would have thought they knew Jesus already, and even today, those who know most about Jesus without obeying him risk taking him for granted: <<*Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." But he will say, "I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!" There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out*>> (Luke 13:26-28); indeed, Nazareth was a small town from which even Nazarenes did not expect a great prophet, let alone the Christ: <<*Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see'*>> (John 1:46).

They never expected the Kingdom to come in a hidden way or to come as close to them as it did (vv.31-33); hence those closest to the Kingdom did not recognise it, and it passed them by.

His brothers and his sisters refers to other children born to Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus. Some interpreters, seeking to defend a doctrine of the 'perpetual virginity of Mary', have suggested that these were cousins, or children of Joseph from another marriage, but no evidence in the Greek words *adelphoi* 'brothers', and *adelphai* 'sisters', or in any other historical information, gives support to that view. For Mary to have a normal sexual relationship with her husband Joseph, and to bear children to him, would contribute to her holiness, not detract from it: <<*God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'*>> (Genesis 1:28), <<*The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive*

one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control>> (1 Corinthians 7:3-5), and: <<So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us>> (1 Timothy 5:14).

For further comments on Jesus' family, refer to [Mark 6:3 on the website](#).

⁵⁷ And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour except in their own country and in their own house.'

Matthew 13:57

Took offence. Jesus had already stated: <<*And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me*>> (Matthew 11:6), where this beatitude is seen by some as a mild rebuke to the disciples of John the Baptist. On this occasion, the people of Nazareth cannot accept the reality of who Jesus really is, based on their previous perceived knowledge of him. Therefore, they found his claims to be offensive to their own messianic expectations.

Prophets are not without honour except in their own country and in their own house. Jesus aligns himself with the OT prophets who had revealed God's will for the people of Israel but had consistently been rejected by them. Both Jesus and his true followers will be rejected. This principle so permeated the early Christian understanding of Jesus' rejection by the leaders of his people that it figures prominently in the Gospels: <<*If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you*>> (John 15:18). Jesus' contemporaries already knew and emphasised that prophets were rejected, such as the proclamation by Stephen: <<*Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers*>> (Acts 7:52), but never thought to apply concretely in this case what they professed abstractly.

⁵⁸ And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

Matthew 13:58

He did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief. Mark writes that, due to their lack of faith: <<*And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them*>> (Mark 6:5), whereas Matthew clarifies this to say that he would not do much there for the same reason. Jesus would not act like a mere magician and required an element of faith to be present before healing anyone. This was not someone struggling with their belief; this was hostile rejection towards faith in Jesus. Hard-heartedness and rejection of Jesus prevent the Spirit's healing ministry, just as they prevent forgiveness of sin; refer to comments made on Matthew 12:31-32. The Holy Spirit does not force his miracles on a hostile, sceptical audience.