

The Good Soil (Mt. 13)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In Matthew 13 there are seven parables about the kingdom of God that Jesus taught by the Sea of Galilee, autumn AD 28 (*Mt. 13:1-52; Mk. 4:1-34; Lk. 8:4-18*).
- B. The religious leaders in Israel had publicly declared their animosity toward Jesus. Because of their rejection of Him, Jesus began to teach in parables that concealed new truths about the kingdom from those whose hearts were hardened against God.
- C. Matthew 13 contains seven parables about the kingdom—the first four were spoken to the crowds and the last three only to the disciples. Jesus spoke in parables both to reveal and conceal truth. That is, to make truth easier to understand for those who are receptive to Him and to hide truth from those who harden their hearts against Him.

II. THE MESSIANIC EXPECTATION: THE COMING KINGDOM OF DANIEL 2

- A. Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream about a statue that represented four Gentile kingdoms that would arise—Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (Daniel 2).

31“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image [Gentile kingdoms] ...34 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image... 35Then [they] ... were crushed ...so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth... 44the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed and...it shall break in pieces...all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.” (Dan. 2:31-44)

- 1. The “stone cut without hands” spoke of the kingdom of God being manifested on earth. The stone struck and *completely destroyed the statue* (the oppressive Gentile kingdoms), and then the little stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan. 2:34-35).
- 2. Daniel 2:34-35 pictured a single cataclysmic event which ushered in God's kingdom with power—as a stone that struck and shattered the oppressive governments. Thus, Israel was looking for Messiah who would totally remove all the opposing evil kingdoms.

III. JESUS' PURPOSE FOR SPEAKING IN PARABLES (MT. 13:10-17)

- A. Jesus explained why He taught with parables (13:10-17)—both to reveal and to conceal truth.

10And the disciples...said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” 11He answered..., “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12For whoever has, to him more will be given...but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13Therefore I speak to them in parables,

because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (Mt. 13:10-13)

- B. ***Mysteries of the kingdom:*** These parables revealed the mysteries of how the kingdom is manifested in this age. A “mystery” in the Scripture speaks of truths not revealed in the Old Testament and only revealed in the New Testament. Paul defined a mystery as that “*which has been hidden but now is revealed*” to God’s people (Col. 1:26). It is not a truth difficult to understand, but a truth that can be understood only by divine revelation in the New Testament.

26...the mystery which has been hidden from ages...but now has been revealed to His saints.” (Col. 1:26)

- C. ***Seeing they do not see:*** Many who “saw and heard physically” did not “see and hear spiritually.” The understanding that a person “has” or “does not have” is related to their receptivity. Jesus emphasized that truth is not neutral; it hardens or softens those who are exposed to it.
- D. Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom had come, yet it came in an unexpected and hidden form that did not overwhelm the present order of life. It grows only as people respond in faith and obedience. Israel expected a cataclysmic event like what will happen when Jesus returns. However, Jesus’ message was that, though small, the kingdom promised in Daniel 2 is here in its early stage.
- E. Jesus conveyed four aspects of “the mystery,” or four new truths, in the seven parables (Mt. 13). He taught that *in this age obedience to the kingdom will be voluntary and not enforced*; second, that *the kingdom will start very small, yet it will eventually fill the whole earth*; third, *its great value will be hidden to many*; and finally, that *God will separate the wicked from the righteous by His judgments at the end of the age*. The mystery is that the kingdom would be revealed in stages.

IV. THE SETTING AND SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

- A. The setting in which Jesus taught the parables of the kingdom (*Mt. 13:1-3; Mk. 4:1-2; Lk. 8:4*): A great crowd by the Sea of Galilee forced Jesus to speak from a boat (*Mk. 3:9; Lk. 5:3*).

1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables... (Mt. 13:1-3)

- B. Parables one (the four soils) and two (the wheat and the tares) teach that kingdom obedience is not forced. The parable of the sower speaks of very different responses to the message of the kingdom.
- C. Parables three (mustard seed) and four (leaven) teach that the kingdom starts small and grows large. The leavening process highlights the internal and invisible dynamic of its global growth.
- D. Parables five (treasure) and six (pearl) teach that the kingdom’s value is not seen by most people.

- E. Parable seven (dragnet) teaches that the removal of the wicked will occur at the end of the age. The parable of the tares (parable two) also teaches this.

V. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE FOUR TYPES OF SOIL (MT. 13:3-9, 18-23)

- A. The parable of the sower and the seed was spoken to the crowd (Mt.13:3-9; Mk. 4:3-9; Lk. 8:5-8). It described how the crowds responded to His teaching by illustrating the four types of responses people make to the preaching of God's reign. These four types of soil were familiar to farmers who scattered seeds as they walked through their fields. Jesus interpreted this parable in Mt. 13:18-23.

3 "...Behold, a sower went out to sow...4 some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Some fell on stony places...and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 But...because they had no root they withered away. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns...choked them. 8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Mt. 13:1-8)

1. **Wayside:** Some seeds fell on the path where birds ate them before they germinated (13:4).
 2. **Stony places:** Seed that falls on stony ground may grow quickly in the shallow topsoil, but because it does not have deep roots to obtain the necessary moisture, it dies (13:5-6)
 3. **Thorns:** Seed that falls among the thorns will eventually be choked by the thorn bushes that squeeze out the young plant, robbing it of necessary nourishment, so it dies (13:7).
 4. **Good ground:** Some seed fell on good ground and produced a crop.
- B. In each case, the seed is the same, but the difference is in the receptivity of the soil or the heart response of each person who heard the message of the kingdom.

VI. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (MT. 13:18-23)

- A. Jesus explained the parable of the sower and seed (Mt. 13:18-23; Mk. 4:13-20; Lk. 8:11-15). The seed is the Word of God which fell on four types of soil, speaking of the responses to the Word.

19When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one ...snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. 20But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Mt. 13:19-23)

- B. **Wayside:** Some seeds fell on the hard path where birds ate them quickly (13:4).

- C. ***Stony places:*** Seed that fell on stony ground (13:5-6) immediately sprouted with an initial joyful response. This convert fell away as soon as persecution happens, showing his response was not deep or genuine lacking the necessary root system to weather the storm of tribulation.
- D. ***Thorns:*** Seeds that fell among the thorns ultimately were choked out (13:7) by cares or anxiety of this world. This choking out was done by the seduction of riches and cares of the life leading to becoming unfruitful.
- E. ***Good ground:*** The seed that fell on good ground produced an extraordinary crop. A tenfold yield was considered good. Genuine believers seek to obey the Word and thus become spiritually fruitful, though the measure of fruitfulness varies. Jesus commended all who received the message regardless of their measure of productivity.
- F. Two groups made a profession of faith that later proved superficial. They began well, but failed to continue to follow the Lord. Whether they are saved or lost is not the point emphasized in this parable. What matters most is not a person's profession of faith, but their perseverance in faith.
- G. Summary:
 - 1. The first type heard the Word of God, but the devil stole it.
 - 2. The second heard the Word of God, but only had a shallow response to it.
 - 3. The third type heard the Word of God, but thorns of worldliness choked the life of that seed.
 - 4. The fourth type heard the Word of God and had varying degrees of fruitfulness.
- H. The next six parables that follow elaborate on this first parable by showing us other pictures of other aspects of the arrival and growth of the kingdom of God.
 - 1. The parable of the wheat and tares explains hypocrites and heretics in the Church.
 - 2. The third and fourth parables (mustard seed and leaven) show how the kingdom advances.
 - 3. The fifth and sixth (treasure and pearl) show the great value of the kingdom.
 - 4. The seventh (dragnet) reinforces the truth of the parable of the wheat and tares, showing the importance of that truth so that we are neither deceived nor offended.