

The Life and ministry of Christ, Part 16

As we have seen, Jesus taught the multitudes in parables. Matthew 13:34 tells us “without a parable He did not speak to them.” About one-third of Jesus’ teaching was in parables. After giving the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus’ disciples asked, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

Matthew 13:11 NKJV He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

His parables were a fulfillment of prophecy (Psalms 78:2) and a revelation of things that were kept secret from the foundation of the world, (Matthew 13:33). These “mysteries of the kingdom” were things that were not revealed until that time. In Luke 12, Jesus shared parables about His second coming, which are part of a series of parables about the kingdom of God. The purpose of His parables was to make hidden spiritual truths easier to understand for those who would receive the truth. When we evaluate these parables, great spiritual truths are revealed that otherwise would have been hidden. The Jews expected the arrival of a powerful kingdom that would arise to destroy evil, a kingdom that could not be resisted. Jesus introduced a kingdom that would be established within the heart and spirit of individuals, a kingdom that necessitates a measurable human response.

Matthew 13:1-2 NKJV On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 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.

Parable of the Sower - Matthew 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:4-15

Matthew 13:3 NKJV Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow.”

In Matthew 13:37, Jesus said the one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. In verse 19, He said the “word of the kingdom” is the seed. So Jesus came into the world to sow the good seeds of the word of life, the word of the kingdom.

Matthew 13:4 NKJV And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

Matthew 13:5-6 NKJV Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

Matthew 13:7-8 NKJV And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸ But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

The Sower scattered seeds indiscriminately.

He cast the seed of the Word of the Kingdom, the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, on every type of soil. Some received the Word with gladness, while other people did not accept it at all. The various types of soil represent the manner in which the seed is received.

Sometimes the presentation of the Word of God is ineffective because Satan immediately snatches it from the heart of those who hear the word, (Matthew 13:4).

This refers to the seed the birds of the air devour. Matthew 13:19 tells us why is Satan able to snatch away what is sown.

Matthew 13:19 NKJV When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

Unbelief blinds the heart and mind and stops the ears of people who hear but do not understand. These people are ever learning but are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

At times the seed of the Word is instantly received but has a superficial benefit. (Matthew 13:5-6)

Difficult situations arise and it is evident that there is no real root or commitment.

Matthew 13:20–21 NKJV But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet 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.

They have no real root, (Matthew 13:5) because they are stony places without much earth or they are emotional shallow-hearted individuals who never really experience salvation. “He has no root in himself” indicates that there is no true commitment to Christ. According to Matthew 13:20-21, they stumble or they are offended when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word. They decide being a Christian isn’t worth it and they abandon subjection to Christ. Every believer should know that when you truly commit to Jesus Christ, the world will hate you. If the Savior was despised and rejected, we should know that we will also face persecution. Those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Other people receive the Word, but the cares of the world choke the Word and they become unfruitful.

Matthew 13:22 NKJV Now 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.

These individuals seem to have a true response to the Word of the Kingdom and appear to be genuinely born again, but the cares of the world and delight in riches make them unfruitful. Jesus said the cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches choke the word. They are unfruitful because worldliness and materialism choke the effectiveness of the Word.

When the seed of the Word falls on good fertile and receptive ground, it produces fruit.

Matthew 13:23 NKJV But 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.”

Even when the soul is “good soil,” and hears the Word and understands it, the result varies with some bearing a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. We should anticipate that the results of receiving the Word will be varied. Some people grow in the Lord more rapidly and produce more fruit than others.

Why spread seed indiscriminately?

Matthew 13:14 NKJV And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: *‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;*

Matthew 13:15 NKJV For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.’

Matthew 13:16–17 NKJV But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

The Word should be spread indiscriminately because some will hear it, receive it, and experience new life and bear fruit.

Parable of the Wheat and Tares - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Matthew 13:24–25 NKJV Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.”

This parable continues where the Lord left off in the previous parable. The Lord said only one-fourth of the seed got into good ground and three-fourths produced nothing. Accordingly, three-fourths were not saved, did not have fruit and the Word had little or no impact or effect on them. Now, the Lord refers to this small area where the seed has been received and produces wheat.

"While men slept" represents the time for germination or development.

God does not sleep or slumber. Everyone who receives the Word of this Gospel experiences a time in which germination or development takes place.

What are tares?

Tares are a particularly undesirable weed that resembles wheat but produces a poisonous seed. The original word for "tares" is "darnel." Jesus is saying these are poisonous human beings (counterfeits) with faulty beliefs that the enemy comes along and sows among true believers. Tares are so deceptive that they are impossible to distinguish until harvest.

Matthew 13:26 NKJV But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

The grain that sprouts represents the sons of the kingdom. The tares and the wheat appeared in the same field. The only thing that made the tares recognizable from the wheat was when the grain appeared. The fruit is the difference.

Matthew 7:20 NKJV Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Matthew 13:27 NKJV So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'

Matthew 13:28–29 NKJV He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.'

Matthew 13:30 NKJV Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' ' "

We should not be disturbed that there are tares and wheat growing together. One day the Lord will separate the tares from the wheat and

bind them together and throw them into the fire. This parable is explained in verses 36-43.

Matthew 13:36-37 NKJV Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” He answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.

Matthew 13:38-39 NKJV The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.

Matthew 13:40-42 NKJV Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

At the end of this age, the Lord’s angels will be sent to gather everyone that offends, practices sin and all evildoers and throw them into the furnace of fire.

Matthew 13:43 NKJV Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

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Parable of the Mustard Seed - Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:31-32; Luke 13:18-19

The parable of the Mustard Seed presents a different kind of seed and message.

Matthew 13:31 NKJV Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,

Matthew 13:32 NKJV which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. The mustard plant grows from the smallest of seeds to a height around 15 feet in one season. The kingdom of heaven depicts the realm in which the Lord rules. The Lord did not explain this parable, but the meaning is clear. Although Christianity started small like a mustard seed, it has grown rapidly and has a worldwide influence. Though insignificant in size at its inception, *“when it is grown it becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and*

make their nests in its branches.” The parable of the mustard seed represents the outward growth of the kingdom.

Parable of the Leaven - Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21

While the parable of the mustard seed represents the outward growth of the Kingdom of God, the leaven represents inner growth.

Matthew 13:33 NKJV Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

Usually in the Bible yeast represents evil. At the Passover, God told them to remove the leaven from their houses, (Exodus 12:15; Leviticus 2:11). The Priests were to eat their bread without leaven, for it was most holy to the Lord, (Leviticus 10:12). Jesus warned about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, (Matthew 16:11-12). He said the leaven of the Pharisees was hypocrisy, (Luke 12:1). Paul said to “purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump.” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). When he was speaking about malice and wickedness, he said; “a little leaven leavens the whole lump,” (Galatians 5:8-9).

In this parable, Jesus is not talking about evil but the dynamic character of yeast.

Once the process of leavening begins, it is impossible to stop. It is inconceivable that Jesus is saying the Kingdom of God would be infected with evil that would corrupt the whole Kingdom. Jesus was saying the Kingdom of God will not grow by outward forces and measures but by the internal dynamic of the Holy Spirit’s power that overcomes all opposition. The parable of the mustard seed illustrates the kingdom’s expansive growth, while the parable of the leaven unveils its potency and the mechanism behind its growth. One thing is clear -- once started, God’s kingdom will continue to grow and have a worldwide influence.

Why are there so many types of soil represented in Christ’s parable?

What keeps an individual from properly responding to the message of the Gospel?

How should we respond to people who may attend church but do not change or grow in Christ?