

22. The kingdom of Heaven is like...

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In 1998, a Marine Corps pilot flying low in the Italian Alps clipped a gondola cable, and 20 people plunged to their death.

Just a few weeks later, a crew of five Navy fliers was killed in California's Sequoia National Forest when their helicopter smashed into power lines.

Three years earlier, a crash involving the same power lines had killed two people.

In 1999, NATO forces bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese journalists and injuring 20 others.

Each of these tragedies had the same cause: faulty maps. Investigators say that the National Imagery and Mapping Agency and its predecessor organization have played a role in at least a dozen accidents since 1985, some involving fatalities and loss of military aircraft.

If we don't have the right map, we will get into trouble. God's Word is the map for our lives.

In chapter 13 of Matthew, Jesus, the Master Communicator brings forth the truth of kingdom of heaven into our modern day lives. Many people insist that the Bible is no longer relevant and outdated. It is the most relevant and up-to-date truth ever can be found in human possession.

This book, the Bible bring out two truth:

A. Responsibility of humanity to believe God

B. God's sovereign choice

A. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Matthew 13:1-2 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.

Jesus often used a boat as His "pulpit" (Mark 2:9). It provided good acoustics to His audience.

Matthew 13:3-9 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Jesus does not leave a room for any preacher to come up his own conclusion of this parable. He explains it to us in v. 18-23

Matthew 13:18-23 "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: 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. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 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. 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. 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."

The four soils represent four types of human hearts:

1) The wayside - The heart is so hardened that the truth of God cannot stay in it.

2) Stony places - I've seen so many people in this type of heart. They get excited about getting to know God; they go buy Bibles; they go buy Christian music CDs, bumper stickers. A few weeks later or a few months later, you cannot find them. Their excitement about Christ went from sizzle to fizzle. Because when they face trials and tests in life, they throw their hands up and go back to their old lives. Did you note "because of the Word"? The persecution because of following the truth from the Word of God will make us to decide which side we are going to stand.

3) Among thorns - The attention of the people with this kind of hearts is divided into many different areas. Yes, they want to follow after Jesus, but they have to worry about how they can increase their wealth; how they can get up to their corporate ladder fast; they don't have peace because they cannot be content with what they have. The portion of their hearts for God is just overwhelmed by other concerns and worries. So it doesn't survive in their hearts.

4) Good ground - Both fertile and weed-free spiritually. These are the people whom God can use to move the world around. I am just hoping that I am one of these people.

Matthew 13:10-17 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 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. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 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; 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.' "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 idea behind the word parable is "to throw along side of." It is a story thrown along side the truth intended to teach. Parables have been called "earthly stories with a heavenly meaning."

The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay. So the very same Gospel message which breaks down honest hearts and leads to repentance, hardens the hearts of the dishonest and confirms them in their path of disobedience.

Heb 4:12 For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In this sense, the parables of Jesus were not illustrations making difficult things clear to all who heard. They were a way of "embedding" God's message so the spiritually sensitive could understand, but the hardened would merely hear a story and they don't get the true meaning.

B. THE PARABLE OF WHEAT AND THE TARE

Matthew 13:24-30 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. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. 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?' 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. 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."'"

Satan's strategy for his battle against God and His people is, "If you cannot beat them, join them." That is what exactly Satan is doing here. Since he cannot get rid of Christians, he plants false Christians in the midst of us.

Again, Jesus explains this parable for us.

Matthew 13:34-43 All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world." 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. 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. 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. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

I was told that tares look like wheat in the early stages and can only be distinguished from it when the head appeared.

The field is not human hearts. The field is the world. Christ is sowing true believers in various places that they might bear fruit. But, wherever Christ sows a true Christian, Satan comes and sows a counterfeit. The counterfeit Christian looks like one, smells like one and he or she even talks like one. But they are not God's children.

Our task is not to pull up the false, but to plant the true. We are not detectives but evangelists!

When we face the darkness, we don't pick up a baseball bat and swing at it. We simply turn on the light switch which is the Word of God.

C. THE PARABLE OF MUSTARD SEED & LEAVEN

Matthew 13:31-33 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, 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." 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."

Since Jesus did not explain this parable, we must use what He did explain in the other parables to find its meaning.

The birds in the Parable of the Sower represented satan. Passages like Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 17:23 indicate that a tree is a symbol of a world power. These facts suggest that the parable teaches an abnormal growth of the kingdom of heaven, one that makes it possible for satan to work in it. Roman Catholic has become a worldwide power with a complex organization of many branches. What started in a humble manner, today it boasts of material possessions and political influences.

The mustard seed illustrates the false outward expansion of the kingdom, while the leaven illustrates the inward development of false doctrine and false living. Throughout the Bible, leaven is a symbol of evil. It was excluded from the sacrifices in the OT.

Satan has worked hard to introduce false doctrine and false living into the ministry of the Word of God. From the very early days of the church, true believers have battled false doctrine and hypocrisy.

Some of your Bible study notes including mine say that these two parables have good meanings. Their interpretations are wrong. When you study these in contexts between the parable of Wheat and the tares from v 24-30 and v 36-43, Jesus is using these parable of the mustard seeds and the leaven to warn us about false doctrines.

D. MORE PARABLES ABOUT THE KINGDOM

1) Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:44 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

The common interpretation of this parable is that the sinner finds Christ and gives up all that he possesses to gain Him and be saved. But this interpretation presents several problems. To begin with, Jesus Christ is not a hidden treasure. He is the best-known Person in the history. Secondly, the sinner cannot "find Christ," for he is blind and stubborn. It is the Savior who finds the lost sinner. Besides, no sinner could ever purchase salvation!

The field is the world. Jesus is the man who gave all that He had to buy the world. What could the treasure be so wonderful that Jesus would give all to purchase it? You and me! Jesus gave everything to redeem the whole world to preserve a treasure in it, and the treasure is His people.

2) Costly Pearl

Matthew 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Again, Jesus is the buyer and we are the pearl that He sees us so valuable & precious that He would happily give all to have it forever.

3) Dragnet

Matthew 13:47-50 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

The same concept as the parable of the wheat and the tare.

Matthew 13:51-58 Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old." Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house." Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Because these villagers were so familiar with Jesus as a boy, and so unaccustomed to spectacular things from Him. I am sure you have noticed in your own life that it is more difficult to witness to our own family members than a complete stranger.

God is not limited by anything nor anyone. But He would withheld His mighty works from the people who wouldn't believe. Are you one of those who doesn't believe God?

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Which type of soil do you have in your heart?

Is your heart like the wayside that no plants can grow, because you don't care to have truth in your heart?

Or is your heart like the stony place that receives the Word of God with joy for a short time and discard because you have no desire for living for God?

Or are you like the soil with full of thorns that choke your desire to follow God out of your heart, because you are more concerned about the life on this earth?

Or do you have a good fertile spiritual soil in your heart, so that whenever you hear the Word of God, the truth, you cannot wait to be more like Jesus your Savior?

You decide.

If you don't have any peace or contentment in your heart that only come from God, you need to examine yourself and ask God which type of soil you are.

Can a person with the wayside heart change to a good fertile spiritual soil? Yes, a thousand times yes! Again, it is your choice to follow God with all of your heart!

2) If you are here in the midst of us and pretending you are a Christian, you can fool all of us. But you cannot fool God who knows your heart. You too can have a heart to follow Jesus as your Savior and Lord sincerely. Again, you choice!