



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 13

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Introduction

In this Chapter We Will Study:

- The purpose of parables
- What the parables reveal about the kingdom of heaven



An Overview

- Jesus begins to speak in parables
- Jesus teaches seven parables
- He gives the reason why He is teaching in parables as well as an explanation for two parables that His disciples found difficult to understand
- His goal appeared to separate the truth seekers from the curiosity seekers
- At Nazareth, He taught in the synagogue where He found an unreceptive audience



An Overview

Chapter 13 is divided into three sections:

I. The Kingdom Parables (verses 3b-53)

1. Parable of the Sower (verses 3b-9, 18-23)
2. Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (verses 24-30, 36-43)
3. Parable of the Mustard Seed (verses 31-32)
4. Parable of the Yeast (verse 33)
5. Parable of the Hidden Treasure (verse 44)
6. Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (verses 45-46)
7. Parable of the Sorting of Good and Bad Fish (verses 47-50)



An Overview

II. Instruction on how to understand Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven (verses 51-53)

III. Jesus' Rejection at Nazareth (verses 54-58)



An Overview

The third discourse on the parables of the Kingdom is summed up with three Last Judgment:

- I. The Kingdom Compared to a Hidden Treasure (13:44)
- II. The Kingdom Compared to a Pearl of Great Price (13:45-46)
- III. The Kingdom Compared to the Sorting of Good and Bad Fish (13:47-50)

Jesus will use the word "kingdom" twelve times (Mt 13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47 and 53; it is for this reason that the parables in chapter 13 are called "the seven Kingdom Parables."

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- Jesus coming out of the house and sitting by the sea is the signal that He is ready to teach
- This was the Sea of Tiberias
- Such a large crowd assembled
- It was the turning-point in His public teaching, since the parabolic instruction now begins
- Jesus relocates to one of St. Peter's boats
- The boat is positioned just off the shoreline to give the crowd the best advantage to both see and hear Jesus speak

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- The word “parable” in Greek is *parabole*
- In the usual sense in Greek literature, a *parabole* presents a comparison to inspire deeper thought
- Jesus uses parables that are comparisons between the truths of His teachings and the events of everyday life
- His first parable is about sowing seeds in different kinds of soil

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- Every element in the parable is symbolic
- There was grain land on every side, and the figure was familiar to every hearer
- There are no farm houses in Palestine
- All live in towns or villages
- Hence, the farmers go forth to sow

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- Sowing is always done by hand
- This was a common farming technique in which most, but not all, of the seed was expected produce healthy plants
- In Scripture the number four represents the world
- Jesus came to the whole world
- Stony places - Where there was little ground, but where it was hard and rocky, so that the roots could not strike down into the it for sufficient moisture to support the plant

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- They sprang up the sooner because there was little dirt to cover them
- It was not rooted in that deep moist soil which would have enabled it to resist the scorching heat of the sun

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



Saint Cyril on the first and second kinds of soil:

“No sacred or divine word will be able to enter those who have minds that are hard and unyielding, for it is by the aid of such words that the joyful fruit of virtue can grow. Men of this kind are highways that are trodden by unclean spirits, and by Satan himself, and they shall never be producers of holy fruit, because their hearts are sterile and unfaithful”

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- In a part of the field where the thorns and shrubs had been imperfectly cleared away and not destroyed
- The thorns grew with the grain, crowded it, shaded it, exhausted the soil, and thus choked it, strangled it and suffocated the growing plant
- The good ground is the fertile and rich soil
- The goodness of this last soil consists in its qualities being precisely the reverse of the other three soils

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- It was not hard, stony, or weedy
- This difference of fruits is the difference of merits here, and of the rewards hereafter
- *He who has ears to hear*, By these words, we are urged to examine the meaning of the parables
- It is God who speaks in the Scripture, and it is God who gives us to understand what is therein delivered

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-9)



- His truths He conceals from the proud, while He reveals them to the little and humble
- This parable shows that the Lord makes no distinction between rich and poor, wise and unwise, lazy and diligent, brave and coward, but He converses and talks to all (all kind of soils)
- With God: it is possible for rock to become rich land; it is possible for the wayside to no longer be trampled on, nor lie open to all that pass by; and it is possible that the thorns are destroyed, so that the seed may enjoy full security

The Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)



- God has granted knowledge to the disciples because their receptive hearts have made them open to accepting the revealed mystery
- It is because of their response to the gift of God's grace that they will receive more understanding
- Those who have been made some spiritual progress will go on, and have greater knowledge
- But to those who have listened with a closed and critical heart, He will take away even what little they have heard in that they will fail to understand the significance of what Jesus taught

The Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)



- Those who have no desire for spiritual knowledge
- Shall lose even their capacity for spiritual things
- Whoever uses his opportunities will grow; whoever abuses them will lose them
- “It was a voluntary and self-chosen blindness, therefore He said not simply, “They see not,” but, “seeing, they see not;” so that the blindness is of their own wickedness. For they saw even devils cast out, and said, “By Beelzebub, prince of the devils, He casteth out the devils.” They heard Him guiding them unto God, and evincing His great unanimity with Him, and they say, “This man is not of God.”-St. Chrysostom

The Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)



- Since then the judgment they pronounced was contrary both to their sight and hearing, therefore, saith He, the very hearing do I take away from them. For they derive thence no advantage, but rather greater condemnation. For they not only disbelieved, but found fault also, and accused, and laid snares. However, He saith not this, for it is not His will to give disgust in accusing them. Therefore neither at the beginning did He so discourse to them, but with much plainness; but because they perverted themselves, thenceforth He speaks in parables. St. Chrysostom

The Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)



- A quote from Isaiah 6:9-10, pronouncing the same judgment as Jesus made for two reasons:
 1. It is another fulfillment statement
 2. Lest any one suppose His words to be a mere accusation, and lest men should say, Being our enemy He is bringing these charges and insult against us; He introduces the prophet
- Isaiah describes a spiritual state that existed in the time of Christ, and is often met still, when, on account of hardness of heart and love of the world, men cannot understand the gospel and repent

The Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)



- It was possible upon their repentance that they might be saved
- It was not for His own glory, but for their salvation, He was doing all things
- “For if it had not been His will that they should hear and be saved, He ought to have been silent, not to have spoken in parables; but now by this very thing He stirs them up, even by speaking under a veil “For God willeth not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn unto Him and live”

St. Chrysostom

The Purpose of Parables (13:10-17)



- Not only were the disciples blessed above the blinded just spoken of, but favored above the most honored and the best that lived under the old economy, who had but glimpses of the things of the new kingdom, just sufficient to kindle in them desires not to be fulfilled to any in their day
- For they indeed lived by and died in the faith of the promised Messiah: but His apostles by sight too, and much more distinctly
- See how again He connects the old with the new, signifying that those of old not only knew the things to come but also greatly desired them

The Parable of the Sower Explained (13:18-23)



- In order to understand the parable we must listen to the explanation
- Christ is the great Sower, and all whom He sends forth to preach are sowers under Him
- The seed sown is His Word, the Gospel of the Kingdom
- The soil is human hearts

The Parable of the Sower Explained (13:18-23)



- Four kinds of human hearts are described:
 - (1) The wayside hearer; He is the one that is careless and inattentive, negligent and forgetful. His heart is an open road, where evil affections, and foolish and hurtful desires, continually pass and repass, without either notice or restraint. The word of God makes no impression on him

The Parable of the Sower Explained (13:18-23)



(2) The stony hearer; the heart that exhibits a temporary feeling at the appeal of the gospel; but upon whom no permanent impression is made. Those who are caught with it as something new or pleasing; who profess to be greatly delighted with it, and who are full of zeal for it. But they are not true Christians. Their hearts are not changed. They are not really attached to the gospel

The Parable of the Sower Explained (13:18-23)



- (3) The thorny soil; the heart that takes in the Word, but is so full of worldly cares that these presently gain the mastery. This describes the world-serving hearer. This person hears the word but does not love God above all else; the secular world pulls him away from faith and he bears no good fruit/works
- 4) The good soil; the good and honest heart; the heart that receives and retains the truth. In such a heart the seed will grow and the new life will be manifest. A heart that submits itself to the full influence of truth, unchecked by cares and anxieties

The Parable of the Sower Explained (13:18-23)



Three things, then, are needful:

- (1) A Sower
 - (2) Good Seed, the pure word of God
 - (3) A good and honest heart
- A dishonest man cannot be changed until he casts out his dishonesty
 - He who resist and deceitfully declare the word of God will not profit

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- The object of all parables in this connection is to explain various features and principles of the kingdom of heaven
- The Kingdom is not linked to the field in which the tares and wheat were both sown, nor to the enemy who sowed the tares
- The kingdom of heaven is linked to a man which sowed good seed in his field
- The kingdom does what the Sower is represented as doing
- It sows the good seed

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- In general, the world may be termed the field of God; and in particular, those who profess to believe in God through Christ are His field or farm; among whom God sows nothing but the pure uncorrupted word of His truth
- During sleep is the time of the tare-sowing
- Jesus did not say while the Sower was asleep, but while men were asleep

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- Spiritually asleep
- They were lukewarm
- The enemy is the devil, Matthew 13:39; Christ enemy
- The wheat is the children of God
- The tares are meant "the children of the wicked one"; Satan, the enemy and adversary

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- By some means or another, the wicked one gets into churches
- At first they look like wheat, like true believers, have a form of godliness, an appearance of grace, but are in need of it; and prove tares, unfruitful, unprofitable, and of no account
- *And went his way*; somewhere else, to do more harm; and having done all he could at present here, undiscovered, not taken notice of by men; they being all asleep, and having lost, in a great measure, the spirit of discerning

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- The tares had grown with the wheat, but were so much like it as not to be noticed until the wheat began to ripen
- Observe that there is no thought of the tares injuring the wheat
- The servants are the ministers of the Gospel, the servants of Christ, who are made use of in planting, sowing, and weeding His field, the church

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- Observing the tares, and fearing the danger the wheat was in by them, as well as troubled and surprised at the appearance and growth of them, they came to the Sower
- A faithful and vigilant minister of Christ will not fail to discover the evil, to lament it, and to submit himself to God by prayer, in order to find out the cause of it

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- Their manner of address, calling him Sir, or Lord, is expressive of their reverence of him, and obedience to him; and which is said, not in word only, but in the sincerity of their hearts, and under the influence of the Spirit of God
- This well expresses the surprise, disappointment, and anxiety of Christ's faithful servants and people at the discovery of "false brethren" among the members of the Church
- They imply, that nothing but good could come from Christ; no bad seed, no tares could be of His sowing; and declare their ignorance of the rise of them

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- His answer was in kind words honorably clearing His faithful servants of the wrong done to His field
- Compare their answer with the question of James and John, (Lk 9:54), "*When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?'*"
- God judges quite otherwise than men of this mixture of good and evil in the world
- He knows the good which He intends to produce from it, and how far His patience towards the wicked should extend

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- The tares would not spoil the true wheat, and in time of harvest it would be easy to separate them
- Hypocrites and deceived persons must be expected in the church
- It is the work of the enemy
- Christ will Himself separate them at the proper time
- Harvest time will come, and that is the time of separation
- The tares, ripened and manifest, can easily be sifted out from the wheat
- The prayers of repenting sinners are never despised
- God in His mercy gives sinners every chance to repent their sins and turn back to a fruitful relationship with Him

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (13:24-30)



- God will not visit judgment upon the sinner until the last breath the sinner takes in this life
- We are taught also by this example not to cut off too hastily a fallen brother; for, whatever he may be to-day, to-morrow perhaps he may see his error and embrace the truth (St. Jerome)
- Sometimes the persons who have been corrupted and perverted, will return to the paths of virtue and truth. Let, therefore, both grow until the harvest, i.e. to the day of judgment, when the power of rectifying another's error shall be no more (St. Augustine)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32)



- The former parable sets forth the condition of the Gospel church state until the end of the world
- This parable is a representation of the progress of the Gospel in the world
- It shows the beginnings of the gospel would be small, but its latter end would greatly increase
- It is also a representation of the growth of grace in the soul
- That grace which leads the soul to the fullness of glory may begin, and often does, in a single good desire and then it will at last come to great strength and usefulness

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32)



- The contrast here is between the small beginnings of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and its future expansion to encompass the whole earth, sheltering all who come to dwell in the household of Jesus that is the Church
- The gospel of Christ, compared in this verse to the grain of mustard seed, has indeed little show of magnificence and human greatness. St. Paul calls it a scandal to the Jew, and a stumbling block to the Gentile. But Jesus Christ here assures us, that when it has been spread and promulgated by his ambassadors, the apostles, it shall surpass every other mode of instruction both in fame and extent. (St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine)

The Parable of the Leaven (13:33)



- In Scripture leaven/yeast is usually a negative image often representing sin (Ex 12:15, 19; 13:7; Mt 16:6; 1 Cor 5:6-8)
- But not in this parable
- The other parable declared the fact that the gospel would greatly spread, and that faithfulness in the heart would greatly increase
- "the Mustard Seed" seems to point mainly to the outward
- The leaven is the inward growth of the kingdom
- "the woman" here represents the Church, as the instrument of put the leaven
- It works silently, and without being seen, yet strongly; without noise, for so is the way of the Spirit



The Parable of the Leaven (13:33)

- The apostles, by preaching the gospel, hid a handful of leaven in the great mass of mankind
- It was made powerful by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, who works, and none can hinder
- It is in the heart
- When the gospel comes into the soul, it works a thorough change; it spreads itself into all the powers and abilities of the soul, and alters the property even of the members of the body, Romans 6:13
- The hidden leaven, though only a small quantity, passes on its qualities to the large mass
- The Parable teaches that the Gospel is the leavening influence of the world



Prophecy and the Parables (13:34-35)

- *without a parable He did not speak to them*, that is, on this occasion; refraining not only from all plain discourse, but even from all interpretation of these parables to the mixed multitude
- He begins to speak in parables for several reasons
- One is that the opposition of the Pharisees and chief priests and their questioning had turned to outright rejection and hostility
- Therefore, Jesus reacts to their opposition in the same way that other prophets of God have reacted to the rejection of God's messenger or the failure of the civil and religious authorities to guide the people in righteousness

Prophecy and the Parables (13:34-35)



- Another reason is that He might raise our minds, from and through natural things, to the great God, and the operations of His grace and Spirit
- Divine things cannot be taught to man but through the medium of earthly things
- The quote is from Psalms 78:2
- As in the other "fulfillment" statements, St. Matthew applies the fulfillment of this verse to Jesus' parable teachings

The Parable of the Tares Explained (13:36-43)



- The themes of this parable are both the patience of the Lord in waiting for sinners to repent and the inevitability of a final judgment
- His disciples came : To understand clearly the meaning of the Divine message, a man must come to God by frequent, fervent, secret prayer
- The kingdom is likened to a man sowing good seed in his field
- The Sower is the Son of man, who sows by means of His kingdom
- The good seed is the word of God as seen in its fruits, Christ's followers
- The wheat raised from the good seed is the children of the kingdom, the disciples of Christ His followers

The Parable of the Tares Explained (13:36-43)



- The field is the world; Christ's field
- The tares are those who have been under the influence of the wicked one
- This enemy is represented as a deceitful enemy: a friend in appearance, soliciting to sin, by pleasure, honor, riches, etc.
- Notice the contrast between "the children of the kingdom" and the "children of the evil one."
- Once again, Jesus teaches that there is no middle ground
- If one is not a child of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, he has chosen to be a child of Satan

The Parable of the Tares Explained (13:36-43)



- All power is given to Him in heaven and in earth
- His kingdom is rightfully the whole earth, but much of it is held still by the enemy, who has to be conquered
- He will prevail finally
- The righteous and wicked are to remain in the earth together
- The righteous are not to destroy the wicked
- The evil and the good will be mixed until judgment day
- Then all shall be gathered at the throne of judgment
- The righteous shall inherit the kingdom
- All that are wicked shall be cast out of the kingdom
- An eternal separation shall take place

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (13:44)



- This hidden treasure is the gospel of Christ, which leads to the kingdom of heaven
- Thus he who by the knowledge which the gospel affords, has found the kingdom of heaven, should purchase it at the expense of every thing most near and dear to him: he cannot pay too great a price for his purchase
- Those who search the Scriptures, so as in them to find Christ and eternal life, John 5:39, will discover such treasure in this field as makes it unspeakably valuable; they make it their own upon any terms
- Though nothing can be given as a price for this salvation, yet much must be given up for the sake of it

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (13:45-46)



- This Pearl is of great price
- When the convinced sinner sees Christ as the gracious Savior, all things else become worthless to his thoughts
- Eternal salvation from sin and its consequences is the supreme good of man, should be sought after above all things, and prized beyond all that God has made
- Jesus' disciples are like the merchant who found the pearl
- When they discovered the Messiah who had come to announce the Kingdom, they left everything worldly behind to follow Christ and possess the Kingdom

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (13:45-46)



- Both parables focus on the value of the Kingdom and the joy of those who discover the treasure of eternal life
- Both, those who found the treasure in the field and that who discovered the valuable pearl, had the wisdom to understand what they had found and the determination to give up everything worldly to keep it
- What do you value?

The Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-52)



- The world is a vast sea, and men, in their natural state, are like the fish
- Preaching the gospel is casting a net into this sea, to catch something out of it, for His glory who has the sovereignty of this sea
- Hypocrites and true Christians shall be parted: miserable is the condition of those that shall then be cast away

The Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-52)



- The fishermen cannot stop to sort while they are drawing the net
- Nor can the preachers of the gospel always distinguish
- Here again, as in the parable of the Tares, it is taught that, at the end of the world, the angels shall sever the wicked from the just

The Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-52)



- Jesus had spoken the first four in the hearing of the mixed multitude: the last three parables He reserved till, on the dismissal of the mixed audience, He and the Twelve were alone
- Our Lord's question here shows them to be matters of the utmost weight and importance; and that they should be considered again and again, till they be thoroughly understood
- They ought to be diligent, who have to be wise not only for themselves, but who have to dispense the wisdom of God to others

The Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-52)



- The scribes were the theologians of Jesus' time who were trained to interpret the Law and to understand the other volumes of Sacred Scripture written by the Holy Spirit inspired writers of the Old Testament
- A skilful, faithful minister of the gospel, is a scribe, well versed in the things of the gospel, and able to teach them
- Because they know how invaluable is the treasure, the pearl, the kingdom, here mentioned; them, who are scribes and teachers, should cultivate it themselves, and communicate the same blessing to others

The Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-52)



- Thus imitating a father of a family, who draws from his treasure both new and old things, and distributes them to his children, according to their several wants and necessities
- This was a proverbial expression with the Jews, to signify every thing useful or necessary for the provision of a family. (St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom)
- Thus also a pastor of souls throws light upon the mysteries of the New Testament, by the figures of the Old, and explains the workings of grace, by the operations of nature

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth (13:53-58)



- When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed
- His own country—that is, Nazareth; as is plain from Mark 6:1
- He taught them in their synagogue which was on the Sabbath day (Mk 6:2)
- They were astonished and while admitting it, they were offended at it
- They knew Him and His family and therefore could not imagine, how He came by such inspiring and divine knowledge, and by what power He performed such wonderful things; looking upon Him to be a mere man, and a very mean, and disgraceful one

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth (13:53-58)



- Not knowing that He was the wisdom of God, and the power of God; which had they been acquainted with, there would have been no room, nor reason, for such questions
- Men not only sin because of ignorance, but also knowingly and willingly they lay stumbling blocks in their own ways, that when God calls them, they may not obey, and so most plainly destroy and cast away themselves
- He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief
- Unbelief is the great hindrance to Christ's favors
- Unbelief and contempt drive Christ out of the heart, as they did out of his own country

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth (13:53-58)



- Faith was the usual condition of his miracles
- Most scholars believe Matthew's account of Jesus' rejection at Nazareth is the same event told in more detail in the Gospel of Luke where the people of the town became angry and tried to kill Him
- The full story of Jesus' rejection at Nazareth is found in the Gospel of Luke 4:16-30
- Other scholars suggest the account in Matthew 13:54-58 was Jesus' second attempt to preach to the people of His hometown
- Nazareth was about 23 miles southwest of Capernaum



Conclusion

- What is a parable?
- List the seven parables of Jesus found in this chapter
- Compare the last three parables to the condition of the righteous versus the wicked
- What was Jesus purpose in teaching in parables?
- Why would the divine Sower sow his seed where He knows it won't grow?
- What is stony thinking?



Conclusion

- What kind of thorny experiences keep the Word of God from growing in us?
- What are we to learn from a small seed becoming a large tree?
- Why is leaven like the kingdom of heaven?
- What does the hidden treasure represent?
- How was the man with the net like the householder?
- Why was Jesus rejected by many at Nazareth?



Conclusion

For Application:

- Are you more like the laborer digging in the field that accidentally discovers the treasures of the kingdom in 13:44 or are you more like the merchant that deliberately searches and finds the treasure of the Gospel of salvation?
- Which of Jesus' parables resonates with you most deeply? Why?
- Jesus compares how you receive the word of God with the type of ground it falls on. Which type of ground most closely matches how you respond to his word? What makes you think so?