

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
9-13-23

Matthew 13

The Parable of the Sower – Verses 1-3

¹ That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.

13:2-3 Jesus used many stories, or parables (13:34), when speaking to the crowds. These stories compare something familiar to something unfamiliar, helping us understand spiritual truth by using everyday objects and relationships. Jesus’ parables compel listeners to discover truth, while at the same time concealing the truth from those too lazy or too stubborn to see it. To those who are honestly searching, the truth becomes clear. We must be careful not to read too much into parables, forcing them to say what they don’t mean. Each parable has a central meaning unless otherwise specified by Jesus.

Farmer And Sowing Seeds – Verses 4-9

⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

13:8 This parable should encourage spiritual “farmers”—those who teach, preach, and seek to lead others to the Lord. The farmer sowed good seed, but not all the seed sprouted; even the plants that grew had varying yields. Don’t be discouraged if you do not always see results as you faithfully teach the Word. Belief cannot be forced to follow a mathematical formula (i.e., a 4:1 ratio of seeds planted to seeds sprouted). Rather, it is a miracle of God’s Holy Spirit using your words to produce faith in Christ.

Why Did Jesus Use Parables? – Verses 10-17

¹⁰ The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” ¹¹ He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your

ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For 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.

13:10 Human ears hear many sounds, but there is a deeper kind of listening that results in spiritual understanding. When speaking in parables, Jesus was not hiding truth from sincere seekers, because those who were receptive to spiritual truth understood the illustrations. To others they were only stories without meaning.

13:12 This phrase means that we are responsible to use well what we have. When people reject Jesus, their hardness of heart drives away or renders useless even the little understanding they had.

13:16-17 But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear: In light of this, those who do understand the parables of Jesus are genuinely blessed. Not only do they gain the benefit of the spiritual truth illustrated, but they also display some measure of responsiveness to the Holy Spirit.

The Parable Of The Sower – Verses 18-23

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

13:22 How easy it is to agree with Christ with no intention of obeying. It is easy to denounce “the worries of this life” and “the deceitfulness of wealth” and still do nothing to change our ways. In light of eternal life with God, are your present worries justified? If you had everything you could want but forfeited eternal life with God, would those things be so desirable?

13:23 The four types of soil represent different responses to God’s message. People respond differently because they are in different states of readiness. Some are hardened, others are shallow, others are contaminated by distracting worries, and some are receptive. How has God’s Word taken root in your life? What kind of soil are you?

The Parable of the Weeds – Verses 24-30

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First

collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”

13:24-25 His enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat: This parable clearly describes corruption among the people of God. Just as in the previous parable, the wheat represents the people of God. Some corrupting influence is brought, and an influence that may look genuine even as tares may resemble real wheat.

13:30 The young weeds and the young blades of wheat look the same and can't be distinguished until they are grown and ready for harvest. Weeds (unbelievers) and wheat (believers) must live side by side in this world. God allows unbelievers to remain for a while, just as a farmer allows weeds to remain in his field so the surrounding wheat isn't uprooted with them. At the harvest, however, the weeds will be uprooted and thrown away. God's harvest (judgment) of all people is coming. We are to make ourselves ready by making sure that our faith is sincere.

The Parables Of The Mustard Seed And The Yeast – Verses 31-32

³¹ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

13:31-32 This parable accurately describes what the kingdom community became in the decades and centuries after the Christianization of the Roman Empire. In those centuries the church grew abnormally large in influence and dominion, and was a nest for much corruption. “Birds lodging in the branches most probably refers to elements of corruption which take refuge in the very shadow of Christianity.”

The Parable Of The Leaven In The Meal – Verse 33

³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

13:33 In other Bible passages, yeast is used as a symbol of evil or uncleanness. Here it is a positive symbol of growth. Although yeast looks like a minor ingredient, it permeates the whole loaf. Although the kingdom began small and was nearly invisible, it would soon grow and have a great impact on the world.

Jesus' Fulfillment Of Prophecy – Verses 34-35

³⁴ Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

13:34-35 Without a parable He did not speak to them: This does not mean that Jesus never, in His entire teaching and preaching ministry, spoke in anything other than a parable. It describes this particular season of Jesus' ministry, again in the context of increasing opposition from the Jewish leaders.

The Parable of the Weeds Explained – Verses 36-43

³⁶Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” ³⁷He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. ⁴⁰“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴²They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

13:36-39 In His explanation, Jesus made it clear what the different figures in the parable represent. In this we see that the parable of the tares changes the figures slightly from the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:3-9; 13:18-23). In the parable of the soils, the seed represented the Word of God; here it represents true believers. The point of the parables is completely different; the parable of the soils shows how men receive and respond to the Word of God, and the parable of the tares of the field shows how God will divide His true people from false believers at the end of this age.

13:40-41 At the end of the world, angels will separate the evil from the good. There are true and false believers in churches today, but we should be cautious in our judgments because only Christ is qualified to make the final separation. If you start judging, you may damage some of the good “plants.” It’s more important to judge your own response to God than to analyze others’ responses.

13:42 Jesus often uses these terms to refer to the coming judgment. The weeping indicates sorrow or remorse, and gnashing of teeth shows extreme anxiety or pain. Those who say they don’t care what happens to them after they die don’t realize what they are saying. They will be punished for living in selfishness and indifference to God.

13:43 Those who will “shine like the sun” in God’s kingdom stand in sharp contrast to those who receive his judgment. A similar illustration is used in Daniel 12:3.

The Parables Of The Hidden Treasure And The Pearl – Verse 44

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

13:44 The kingdom of heaven is more valuable than anything else we can have, and a person must be willing to give up everything to obtain it. The man who discovered the treasure hidden in the field stumbled upon it by accident but knew its value when he found it. Although the transaction cost the man everything, he paid nothing for the priceless treasure itself. It came free, with the field. Nothing is more precious than the kingdom of heaven; yet God gives it to us as a gift.

The Parable Of The Costly Pearl – Verses 45-46

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

13:45-46 In this parable, the kingdom of heaven is not the precious pearl, but the merchant. In contrast to the previous picture, Jesus is now displaying another aspect of the kingdom. The contrast becomes vivid in the transaction—the kingdom pays the ultimate price to possess the pearl, the price God was willing to pay to redeem us.

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷ **“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

13:47-49 The parable of the fishing net has the same meaning as the parable of the wheat and weeds. We are to obey God and tell others about his grace and goodness, but we cannot dictate who is part of the kingdom of heaven and who is not. This sorting will be done at the Last Judgment by those infinitely more qualified than we.

The Disciples Claim To Understand Jesus’ Parables – Verses 51-52

⁵¹ **“Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied. ⁵²He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”**

13:52 Anyone who understands God’s real purpose in the law as revealed in the Old Testament has a real treasure. The Old Testament points the way to Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus always upheld its authority and relevance. But there is a double benefit for those who understand Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of heaven. This was a new treasure that Jesus was revealing. Both the old and new teaching give practical guidelines for faith and for living in the world. The teachers of the law, however, were trapped in the old and blind to the new. They were looking for a future kingdom preceded by judgment. Jesus, however, taught that the kingdom was now, and the judgment was future. The religious leaders were looking for a physical and temporal kingdom (via military rebellion and physical rule), but they were blind to the spiritual significance of the kingdom that Christ brought.

Jesus Is Rejected At Nazareth – Verses 53-56

⁵³ **When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. ⁵⁴Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. “Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they asked. ⁵⁵“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”**

13:55 The residents of Jesus’ hometown had known Jesus since he was a young child and were acquainted with his family; they could not bring themselves to believe in his message. They were too close to the situation. Jesus had come to them as a prophet, one who challenged them to respond to unpopular spiritual truth. They did not listen to the timeless message because they could not see beyond the man.

A Prophet Without Honor – Verses 57-58

⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.” ⁵⁸ And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

13:57 Jesus was not the first prophet to be rejected in his own country. Jeremiah experienced rejection in his hometown, even by members of his own family (Jeremiah 12:5-6).

13:58 Jesus did few miracles in his hometown “because of their lack of faith.” Lack of faith blinds people to the truth and robs them of hope. These people missed the Messiah. How does your faith measure up? If you can’t see God’s work, perhaps it is because of your unbelief. Believe, ask God for a mighty work in your life, and expect him to act. Look with the eyes of faith.