

Matthew 13:1-7

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[0 : 00] I just wanted to get us in the mood and understanding the parables. But we're skipping ahead today to 10 through 17 and then in chapters 5 through 7 and then in chapter 10, the missionary commission to his disciples.

He hasn't spoken in parables yet. Not really. A few short figurative sayings, but everything so far has been clear. Everything has been really straightforward.

The Sermon on the Mount is just a normal sermon. The missionary commission in chapter 10 is a traditional, a classic coaching and equipping section for people who have a task to do.

Neither of them is figurative. Neither of them is enigmatic. And so when Jesus begins to speak in parables, the disciples take him aside and ask, verse 10, why do you speak to them, that is the crowds, in parables?

Now, when you take a class in public speaking or in good writing or if you go to seminary and you take a class on preaching, you are always encouraged to use illustrations, examples to help people understand the point you're making.

[1 : 35] And we do this everywhere. We teach history, not as a long list of facts and dates, but as basically the story of human civilization.

TED Talks, they're really popular right now. We might be on the back end of the crest of their popularity, but all of them are built around stories. We use word problems to teach math.

We use story to teach business principles, right? Either through case studies or through parables of the business world. Bestsellers like *Who Moved My Cheese*, right?

are book-length parables that are meant to teach business philosophy. We use stories to teach ethics. From Aesop's fables to the chronicles of Narnia to movies in Hollywood, everything is presenting a worldview.

Everything. Through story. One of the most celebrated ad campaigns in the last decade was a beer company creating a mythology around the most interesting man in the world.

[2 : 45] Everything we do is through story. Story is the language of entertainment, of education, of moral instruction, of advertising.

Story is a powerful teaching tool for two reasons. First, it clarifies the lesson and it seals the message in our memory. They're memorable. And Jesus, who made us, knows that.

So, when his disciples ask why he's using parables, we'd expect him to basically say that, right?

We'd expect that answer from Christ.

But we'd be mistaken. Because he says in verse 11, he answered them, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

To them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given. And he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

[3 : 48] This is why I speak to them in parables. Because seeing, they do not see. And hearing, they do not hear. Nor do they understand. Jesus uses these spiritual stories not to clarify, but to obscure.

Why? And how? And again, why? If he came to save sinners, why on earth would he obscure his message?

Especially, after having been so clear before. Let's look closely at his answer and see if we can see what he's up to. The first part of Christ's answer is, To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them it has not been given. What are these secrets of the kingdom of heaven? And why have some not received the knowledge of them?

Herman Ritterbos, the great Dutch theologian, said of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, he says, this phrase is clearly a reference to what Jesus was trying to teach in his parables.

[5 : 07] Well, what was Jesus trying to teach in his parables? As we go through the chapter, chapter 13 here, we're going to see that the parables have two main themes. The first theme, the theme we're going to see in the parable of the sower, which we read today, the parable of the weeds, which we will see in a few weeks.

Christ is talking about the new life we have in Christ. And the second theme, things that we're going to see towards the end of the chapter in things like the parable of the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, is the value of King Jesus and his kingdom.

Which, if you think about it, those two themes, they're not new. The book of Matthew has been about those two themes, hasn't it? He's been preaching repentance and faith, leading to a new life of obedience since the very beginning.

His first words publicly are repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He's been telling us that being found in him is worth any price. And so it's not new. He's been teaching this from the start. And it's not a secret. He's been teaching it publicly the whole time. So why does he call it a secret? And why would he say some people haven't been given to know these truths?

[6 : 27] And why would he exclude anyone? Well, Christianity is not a mystery religion. In the ancient world, there were many small faith groups, we might call them coats today, where you would only receive part of the teaching.

And then, after a time, you had to advance in some way, normally financially, before more of the religion's doctrine was explained to you. And so you kept getting a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more, until finally, once you reached the inner circle, you actually knew what this faith group was about.

And so power was kept by holding and hoarding information, these secrets, mystery religions. Scientology is often cited as a contemporary example of this.

After demonstrating your dependability, you can pay a large sum of money and receive instruction on the next level. To get all the way to the last rung of the Scientology ladder, OT9, and to know the entire doctrine of the Church of Scientology, you'll have to spend something like, they estimate, \$400,000 on courses.

Jesus is not like that. The whole Bible belongs to the whole church. We'll give you one for free. They're on the back table. Go get one.

[7 : 49] Right? And we will encourage you to read it cover to cover. Nothing is hidden. Everything is open. Nothing is held back. Our doctrinal statement, the summary of what we believe this book says, it's on their website.

The Nicene Creed is public domain. It hasn't changed in centuries. And so, in fact, when Jesus says given to know the secrets, he's not even talking about content.

Really. He's not saying that Christians know what the symbols in the parables mean and non-Christians don't. We know that for two reasons.

First, on the one hand, these disciples actually have trouble understanding the symbolism of the parables. We see that when we get to verse 36. His disciples, who he's already said here in verse 11, know the secrets, still need to ask, verse 36, explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field. They don't get it. And on the other hand, his enemies did understand the parables, at least to some extent. When we get to chapter 21, Jesus is going to teach the parable of the tenants.

[8 : 58] And when he concludes it, we're going to read Matthew 21, 45, when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds because they owned to be a prophet. So the disciples sometimes didn't actually understand, and his enemies sometimes did.

So how could then Jesus say that his followers were given to know the mysteries, but those who didn't follow them, even if they got the parables, haven't been given to know these mysteries?

Leon Morris, in his commentary in the book of Matthews, said, while there is a sense in which they certainly see, there is a more meaningful sense in which they do not see at all.

I think what it is, what they don't understand is the beauty of these truths. Instead of drawing them in to Christ, the parables and the truths they convey harden their hearts against him further.

[10 : 18] There's a difference between someone who isn't yet convinced and someone who won't be convinced. I think we know that intuitively. That's why when Jesus quotes here in verse 15

Isaiah's prophecy, he says, their eyes they have closed.

they reject Christ outright and so they won't receive. They won't receive the beauty of these parables.

If you reject Christ and set yourself up in opposition to God, how can you appreciate the things of God? God and that's why at the end of that quote in Isaiah, the Lord says that the root of their problem is that they don't understand with their heart.

I think that is what it is to be given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom. See, you can know the content of the gospel. You can know that we are sinful.

You can know that our sin has earned for us the wrath of God and that God the Son came to live a perfect life in our place and die a substitutionary death in our place on our behalf and that he was raised to life on the third day and for all who repent of their sins and place their faith in him that we are united to him in his life and death and resurrection adopted into his family and we'll live with him forever.

[11:51] You can know all of that. You can know the history of the church. You can read the Bible. You can memorize the Bible and still be separated from Christ.

Why? Because knowing the truth is not the same as embracing and obeying. If I tell you that a car is bearing down on you, you can hear and understand that, but you won't be safe until you move out of the way.

I can tell you to repent and believe and you can hear it and understand it, but that doesn't mean you've ever turned from sin and entrusted yourself to Christ as Lord and Savior.

But when someone does hear with ears to hear, what happens to that? well, here's a parable.

If you're in love with someone, there is a certain music to their words that no one else hears, right?

If you have young children, there is a beauty to their terrible drawings that no one else appreciates, right?

[13:15] how much more, if we love Christ, will his words become beautiful to us? And his cross and his empty tomb.

Knowing the truth of the kingdom and seeing and appreciating and embracing that beauty, that's understanding with the heart.

And that's the Pharisees, the scribes, and all who reject Christ don't have. But, to the person who does, what does Jesus promise?

Verse 12, to the one who has, who has that sight, that spiritual understanding, that appreciation for the beauty of who he is and what he's done, more will be given.

And he will have an abundance. If you have spiritual sight to see, to see the beauty of Jesus and his kingdom, you will be given more sight to better appreciate and celebrate him and your joy will be full.

[14:32] How? Well, certainly, at this life's end, when we stand before our great and wonderful God, the one from whom and through whom and to whom are all things, we will see and delight and be filled.

For sure. And we have that precious hope. It is ours now and forever. But I think Jesus wants us to receive more today as well. I think more will be given to us today.

How? God delights, delights to reveal himself to his people, to those who seek him out. James 4, 8. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

If you have a spirit that seeks God in spirit and in truth, more will be given to you today and you will have an abundance. He will reveal himself to you in his word.

Will you seek him out there? He will be present to you among his people. Will you live with them? He will give you a humble heart in prayer.

[15:46] And you will commune with him as you seek him out. Will you go to him in prayer? Right? Not as an obligation but for your joy. Will you do that? He will show you his mercy even as you serve others.

He will plant his passions in your heart as you share the word of his kingdom. When you walk in his ways, you will begin to appreciate him more.

More will be given to you. You'll see the wisdom of his commands. You'll delight in his truths. You'll grow more and more to love what God loves, justice and peace and righteousness and mercy on the church.

To the one who has, more will be given. A heart that seeks God will get God. on the flip side, Jesus says in verse 14, indeed in their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled.

It says, you will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their hearts, their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

[17 : 18] This prophecy comes in Isaiah 6. It's after one of the most famous parts of the book of Isaiah. In chapters 1 through 5, God gives through Isaiah a series of warnings to his people that there is a coming judgment for Israel's sins.

Then in chapter 6, verses 1 through 7, Isaiah is ushered in a vision into the throne room of heaven where he sees the unspeakable glory of God. In verse 8, God asks this famous question, who will go for us?

And Isaiah says, send me. Isaiah finds out what his message is supposed to be. It's this message, the one that's here quoted in verses 14 and 15.

Here, but do not understand. They're blowing down the walls of Jericho, if you were wondering. And then, in verse 11, Isaiah asks, how long, oh Lord, how long must he present this message to the people?

It's brutal. It sounds hopeless. And the Lord replies, until the cities lie in people in waste.

[18 : 48] That's a hard thing to hear. But so is every confrontation. How do you like being told you're wrong? Most of us hate it. Adventure guests said, all of us do.

And the Lord knew that the message he was sending with Isaiah, you're sinning, repent, wasn't going to be popular. And the people would get defensive rather than softened.

And so the discipline would come, the Babylonian exile for the people of God, and the nation would be ruined. That's Jesus' message. In Isaiah's time, people rejected God's gracious call to return to him.

And it was just the same during Christ's earthly ministry. And it is the same today. We're no different. The message of Jesus causes many to stumble.

The message of grace is confusing to people who think they have no need of it. The message of mercy is offensive to people who think they've done nothing wrong.

[20 : 03] And if that is where your heart is set, I can't change your heart. I have no ability to reach into your heart and do anything to change you. It's not a power I have, but like Isaiah, like Christ, I can offer you this message.

Repent and believe, and you will be reconciled to the living God at no price. promise. I can make that offer because if you look in verse 15, even within the prophecy of judgment, there's still an offer to turn to God and be healed.

The fact that you're hearing his word today means that he calls you, even you, to turn. And in him find life and love and peace.

And for all who have, for all who do, we have verses 16 and 17 as a comfort for ourselves. Blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear.

For truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see and did not see it and hear what you hear and did not hear it.

[21 : 26] Friends, this passage must prompt us to gratitude. Our eyes, we can see the glory of Christ. Our ears hear the message of the gospel of reconciliation and our hearts receive it with joy.

We stand in so privileged a place. Do we not? Isaiah and all the prophets died without hearing the fullness of the gospel.

You and I can hear it every time we gather with God's people. Every time we open God's word. And so this passage prompts us to gratitude.

Gratitude for the salvation we have in Christ. Gratitude for the privileged position we stand in to know more than Moses or David or Isaiah. How great are God's saving plans and purposes.

And this passage also births in us an appreciation for the spiritual sight that we have, that Jesus is here talking about. Without this spiritual sight, we'd have never taken hold of the gospel, never repented, never believed, right?

[22 : 50] Faith requires this spiritual sight. I won't entrust myself to someone I don't see as trustworthy. And so we need to have eyes to see that he is in fact trustworthy.

And repentance, I won't renounce sin and turn from it unless I think it's filthy. And I think there's something better to go get. That requires spiritual sight.

In other words, there can be no salvation, repentance and faith, without spiritual sight. And in fact, we can't live the rest of the Christian life without this spiritual sight either.

Right? We can't obey Christ's commands without it. I won't want to follow God's law unless it looks beautiful to me. Psalm 1.

Delight in the law of the Lord. I won't do that unless I have eyes to see. I won't deny myself unless he himself is better than my other desires.

[23 : 51] We can't worship without spiritual sight. Worship is seeing and rejoicing in the glory of God.

Period. There's no worship without spiritual sight. If he looks like a tyrant, I mean, we might say he's great, but not with any love in our hearts.

That's not worship. If he looks like a vending machine in the sky like prosperity gospel preachers kind of characterize him as, we might appreciate him, but we'll never stand in awe of him because he's just a means to another end.

But if he looks like the desire of nations, the bottomless, endless glory, the sum and the substance of love and beauty, we will worship in spirit and in truth.

And we need eyes to see it. Our Christian obedience, our Christian worship, our Christian hope need these eyes to see.

[25 : 07] Right? I can't desire heaven and place my hope there unless the lamb who is at the center of heaven is wonderful in my eyes.

That's not hopeful if I don't want him. And this spiritual eye, these eyes to see and ears to hear, it is necessary to become and then to live as a Christian, which means we must be grateful for the sight itself.

Right? This prompts us to even more gratitude because this spiritual sight, which is the key to seeing and embracing God, his gospel, and the Christian life is also itself a gift.

Jesus said, it has been given to you to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. So not only are all the benefits of the gospel a gift to be thankful for, so too are the eyes to see and receive it.

When you and I came to faith in Christ, it was because God was working in us to give us eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to appreciate and long for him.

[26 : 25] In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul says, what do you have that you did not receive? Not even our eyes to see. Our Lord shows grace upon grace, mercy upon mercy, opening the eyes of the blind so we might run into his arms.

In John chapter 3, John the Baptist said, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given from heaven.

Our spiritual sight is a gift of heaven. It's not a testimony of how insightful I am. Right? Christians are not superior because we've received the gospel.

Think about it. How ironic would that be to think that I'm superior because I've said I can't save myself. So not only should this prompt us to gratitude, but also humility.

humility. It ought to grow us in a radical humility. If God had not intervened in my life and given me spiritual sight, ears to hear and eyes to see, I'd still be dead in my sins, separated from Christ and paving my own road to hell.

[27 : 59] that humbles me. I hope it humbles you. Which means that our conversations with people who do not yet know Christ must be marked with compassion and humility.

No condescending tone, no harsh judgments on our lips or in our minds. Or in our hearts. Right? The stereotype of the judgmental Christian is the most, it's so opposite the gospel. We who have received grace, all of it by grace, how could we be condescending of all people and think that we're better having said, we have nothing of our own, please save us.

Condescending words towards non-Christians come not from humility but from pride. Pride that has nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They come from a misunderstanding of the missionary task.

They come when we think that we're at war with the world. Friends, we're at war for the world. We proclaim Christ shining light into darkness.

[29 : 23] If we're at war with the world, non-Christians are our enemies. And we'll treat them like that. But if we're at war to rescue those around us, we'll treat them with care and compassion.

They're the ones we're fighting for. Evangelism isn't trampling someone else's arguments until they've been beaten into submission. As one pastor famously put it, evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

When we have eyes to see, we will be humble in our speech. And we will also be perceptive as we assess our situation and our circumstances.

And we will know that God is not, even when it feels like it, holding out on us. He wants us to have joy. Literally, that's one of the fruit of the Spirit.

But he wants us to have lasting joy. So he doesn't want to give us something that is temporary. How do we increase in joy?

[30 : 46] It's based on the spiritual sight. First, we see something that's valuable, that have a desire for it, and then we see that we actually have it, the desire is fulfilled. And so he's not offering us joy in cinema, or fashion, or sex, or accomplishments, or money.

Friends, don't see those things as satisfying. That's how the world sees. It's not spiritual sight. He offers instead everlasting, unending, bottomless joy.

And the only place that's found is in himself. And so he has many ways to see more clearly for our joy that look to us without spiritual eyes, like him holding out.

When he allows us to suffer, he's not holding out on us, he's serving our joy. God's love. The more we suffer, the more we ought to cling to God and long for heaven, if we would have eyes to see.

When he gives us commands, they are for our good and for our joy, if we have eyes to see it. When he commands us to read his word, he's not holding out on us, this isn't a dry obligation.

[32 : 04] salvation. He's training us to know and desire his glory and to find that we have already been adopted to him.

Desire fulfilled. When he commands us to connect to his church, he's not holding out on us, he's serving our joy, placing you in the place where you'll be encouraged to pursue joy in Christ, in study and in worship and in obedience, in every moment, in every circumstance, the Lord beckons you to find him better, best.

And when you do, that is both worship and joy. In his book, *When I Don't Desire God*, John Piper wrote, spiritual perceiving is the creation of a new taste in the soul.

Before our conversion, the honey of Christ tasted sour, or bland, and thus undesirable to our souls. Then, by grace, we were granted a new capacity for sweetness, and we tasted the honey of Christ for what it really is, sweet and desirable.

people. This is the seeing that provides the enjoyment of Christ. Friends, I want that for all of you. Let's pray.

[33 : 47] Lord, our God, I thank you that for everyone here found in Christ, you have opened our eyes, given us ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to cherish Jesus Christ.

Lord, will that prompt us to gratitude? Will it prompt us to joy in him? Will it prompt us to a radical humility and a delight in following hard after you?

Lord, for anyone here who does not yet have eyes to see and ears to hear, I pray that you would give them that sight, that understanding, so that in Christ, their joy may too be fallen.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.