

The Parables

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[0 : 01] Excuse me, I've got a bit of a cold, so no hugs and kisses afterwards please. I've really enjoyed the service so far this morning, and I hope it stays that way.

I always enjoy Gerald's insights, his reading at the start and the insights that he brings. I think there's a preacher in there, I've told him that before. I also love the children's talks and what Kimmy's brought to us today.

I'm really thankful for that song, Kimmy, because it's the one children's song I can do without getting confused with all the actions. So there we go. Anyway, let's just commit this to God in prayer, and then we'll do the reading.

Father, we thank you for that hymn we've just sung, and my prayer is that you will speak. As preachers like to say, hide your servant behind the cross, and may Christ be seen.

In Jesus' name, amen. If you've got your Bibles, can you open with me to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13? Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13.

[1 : 14] I'm reading from verse 1. That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore.

Then he told them many things in parables, saying, A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil.

It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no roots. Other seed fell amongst thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

Still others fell on good soil, where it produced a crop, a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear.

We saw in our reading that the Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13, verse 1, begins, That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.

[2 : 30] Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables. Further down the page at verses 34 and 35, this section of the chapter concludes with these words, Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables.

He did not say anything to them without using a parable. 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. That's from Psalm 78 and verse 2. In verse 11, when his disciples asked him, Why do you speak to the people in parables?

He replied, Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 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. This is why I speak to them in parables. Though seeing, they do not see.

[3 : 39] Though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. You will be ever hearing, but never understanding. You will be ever seeing, but never perceiving.

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.

But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people long to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

The English word parable is a transliteration from the Greek, parabalo, which literally means to place alongside. Jesus used easily understood examples from everyday life that were placed alongside a spiritual truth in order to illustrate or illuminate that truth.

But Jesus' use of parables was twofold. Firstly, it was to conceal the secrets of the kingdom of heaven from those who, as Isaiah indicated, were hard of heart and resistant to the truth.

[4 : 58] But secondly, to reveal the spiritual truth behind the parables to his disciples and anyone who was willing to hear. The Gospels record many of Jesus' parables except John, of course, who, writing much later, avoids repeating the parables of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Most of the parables are about the kingdom of God. Too many to look at in one session. But in this one chapter of Matthew, chapter 13, Matthew records for us seven of Jesus' parables of the kingdom, which give us a good perspective on the subject.

So I propose to look at all seven of these this morning with you. And you might want to follow them in your Bible as we consider them. The seven parables are the parable of the sower, which we heard, the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

Both of these are the most detailed of the seven. These are followed by five short parables, the parable of the mustard seed and of the yeast, which go together. The parable of the hidden treasure and of the pearl of great price, which likewise go together.

Lastly, we have the parable of the fishing net. I will take them in order, except that I want to leave the parable of the wheat and the weeds till last. Now, although these phrases, the phrase kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God appear 36 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, and 32 times in Luke, whilst in the Old Testament, there are very few references, we will not nevertheless fully understand what Jesus meant by it without reference to the Old Testament and in particular the book of Daniel.

[6 : 45] For in chapter 2 of Daniel, in the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, you will recall that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, called all the wise men together and says, I want to know the meaning of the dream.

In fact, he says, tell me the dream and you can tell me the meaning. Of course, the wise men were freaking out because how can we do that? Just tell us the dream, he said, and we'll tell you the interpretation.

No, no, I don't trust you. And then Nebuchadnezzar says, right, you're all going to die. I'm going to kill the lot of you if you don't tell me my dream. Fortunately, Daniel came to the king and said, please give us a little bit more time and I'll seek the God of heaven for the answer.

And God answered and Daniel informed the king, this is what you saw in your dream. Let's see if we can get the picture up. What Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream that Daniel told him was a statue.

He saw this statue with a head of gold, arms and thighs of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of feet, sorry, legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay.

[7 : 55] Then he saw this rock cut out without hands which struck the statue on its feet. So Daniel informed the king, in the times of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people.

It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. So that little rock stands for the kingdom of God which would eventually destroy the statue.

So from the phrase the God of heaven will set up a kingdom, we derive the terms kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. Matthew mostly uses the alternative term the kingdom of heaven as his gospel is particularly aimed at Jewish readers who were sensitive over the use of the word God for fear of taking his name in vain.

Even today Jewish writers will often out of reverence refer to God as G-D in their writings and in speech Jews will often not say God but instead say Hashem which literally means the name.

The time that the kingdom of God was to be set up Daniel indicated as in the time of those kings and so it was during the time of the fourth and final empire of the vision the Roman empire that Jesus and John the Baptist before him began to preach repent for the kingdom of God is near.

[9 : 29] In saying that Jesus was in effect declaring a new development in the purposes of God for in Matthew and Luke he declares the law and the prophets were proclaimed until John since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and everyone is forcing their way into it.

In the original Greek of the New Testament the word for kingdom is Basileia which emphasizes the rule and reign of a king rather than its mere geographical area.

Nevertheless the extent of God's kingdom which began with the nation of Israel was as indicated from Nebuchadnezzar's dream to become worldwide which is one reason no doubt why we are taught to pray thy kingdom come.

But unlike the earthly empires described in Daniel who conquered nations by force and imposed their will upon everyone God allows each individual the freedom to choose to submit to his rule or not.

concerning the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven a Christian website I found says this these phrases invite us to recognize God's sovereignty to align our lives with his will and to participate in his work of renewal in the world.

[10 : 54] They remind us that we are called to be citizens of this kingdom living out its values of love justice and peace in our daily lives even as we await its full consummation.

It was because most of God's people in Jesus' day were not aligning their lives with God's will that Jesus and John the Baptist called upon them to repent for the kingdom of God was near.

In fact later on when Jesus would curse the three towns of Capernaum Bethsaida and Chorazin in which he did most of his miracles it was he said because they did not repent.

In the parable of the sower which is a very well known parable Jesus tells what happens to the seed that a farmer sows in his field. Afterwards he explains the underlying spiritual meaning to his disciples.

When anyone he says 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 a seed sown along the path.

[12 : 05] The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy 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.

The seed falling amongst 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.

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.

I wish my banker crown would grow like that. But just as the seed is good but doesn't always grow to maturity because of the ground it falls on so too the problem is not with a message but with a hearer.

It unfortunately doesn't always have the desired effect but when it does it produces a crop.

Fruitfulness is not only the hallmark of a believer it is also a requirement.

[13 : 17] In John 15 verses one and two Jesus tells his disciples I am the vine and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.

Well every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. Christians I think often have a tendency to not believe some of the more important things that Jesus says but we need to take him seriously when he says that God cuts off every branch that is unfruitful.

Pruning is certainly not a pleasant experience but to be cut off from the vine is much worse. I was in a Bible study once and we were looking at the parable of the sower perhaps a little smugly we all considered that as believers we were the good soil.

Then someone said when I go to church on a Sunday sometimes the message has no effect. It goes in one ear and out the other. Sometimes the preacher says something that makes me enthusiastic to put it into practice but life gets in the way or it proves to be easier said than done and my good intentions come to nothing but sometimes I hear the word and do put it into practice and experience the benefit afterwards.

I can tell you that we were all blown away when he said this because none of us had considered the parable in that way. Next we have the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast.

[14 : 55] The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field. 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.

Again 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. When was the last time ladies mixed up that amount of flour?

I don't know. These verses convey exactly the same meaning that Daniel gives Nebuchadnezzar about the rock that in his dream struck the statue on its feet. He says in verse thirty five of chapter two of the book of Daniel but became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

Just as the rock becomes a mountain and the tiny Jesus indicated that the kingdom of God would grow from a small and seemingly and just as the mountain grew until it filled the whole earth and the yeast worked its way through all will eventually reign supreme in all the earth.

The day will come when revelation of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And the parable of the pearl of great price.

[16 : 16] The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden. He hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that for the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

When he found one of great value he went away and sold everything. These verses speak of two types of people. Like the first man who by treasure hidden in the field some come to faith who are not looking for it but as it were finds someone on the way to the shops might out of curiosity stop to listen to a street preacher and in that moment threw to faith.

That's kind of my testimony. June was only about three at the time. I was in Lonehead at the gala day Miners Gala with some young people who were playing guitars and singing Christian songs and witnessing and stopped to listen went along that night heard the gospel message and that night I gave my life to Christ.

It was my free bag of buns but I got something of greater person who is looking for fine pearls and one day finds a pearl of great price.

There are those who have been searching for God of different religions yet without success until one day picking up a Bible and discovering Christ they realize that they have at last found what they were looking for also of the inestimable value of God's kingdom and the joy that its possession brings.

[17 : 56] Sell all that they have to gain possession of their discovery. There is a saying, keep to gain what he cannot lose. For whatever riches or power or influence, these things are temporary.

What a man or a woman has in Christ is forever. Of the fishing net. Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake.

When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets. But through this is how it will be at the end of the age, says Jesus. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Up until we have related to the kingdom of God in the here and now. But this parable concerns the culmination of the kingdom and that at present we are in phase one of the kingdom which can be summed up in the words of Jesus where he says, I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

There shall come a day when he will come to call the righteous and on that day it will be too late.

This is what the parable of the fishing net tells us. It speaks of what we might call the second phase to judge the world.

[19 : 19] Unlike the fisherman, keeping the good fish and throwing away the himself and cast the wicked into hell. Hell is not a thing that we like to talk about, but seriously, hell is an inevitable reality for those that reject God.

listen to the last words of Sir Thomas Scott, a one-time Chancellor of Inthbed. He said, Until this moment, I thought there was neither a God nor a hell.

Now I am both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty. The atheist philosopher David Hume cried aloud on his deathbed, I am not pleasant reading, not pleasant thinking about that, but it's true.

Well, last, which compasses the kingdom of God, both in the here and now and in its future culmination. From verse 24 to 30 we read, The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while everyone was seed amongst the wheat.

And then he went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed, the owner's servants came to him and said, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field?

[20 : 39] Where then did the wheat? He replied, the servants asked him, do you want us to go and pull them up? Pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them.

Let both grow together until the harvesters first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned, and then gather the wheat. Asked by his disciples what the meaning of the parable was, he answered, The one who sowed the field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.

The weeds are the who sowed them as the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. So it will be at the end of the age.

The son of man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous are father.

Whoever has ears, let them hear. In the parable stands for the message of the kingdom, and in the parable of the mustard seed, the seed stands for the kingdom, its seed stands for the children of the kingdom.

[21 : 51] The first thing to note about this parable of the seed to grow up together with the weeds until the harvest, so the children of God must grow up side by side with the children.

Most of his children, of course, do not see themselves as such, and not all of them are thieves. Many are well-educated, sophisticated, some are even religious.

The Pharisees, you are of your father, the devil. But Jesus tells us that we recognize who is who, cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

But it seems to me the weeds become strong, and when the wheat is strong, the weeds are suppressed and held at bay. That it is the weakness of the church that is behind the decline of our society in Britain today.

Many of our laws reflect the teachings of the Bible, and many of our institutions were the devil has so infiltrated his people into our government, institutions, undermined, and even replaced much that was Christian-based.

[23 : 01] Laws have been passed in our lifetime, not only to God's truth, but to centuries of jurisprudence and accepted practice. We are found guilty of premeditated murder as no longer an option, even for serial killers or terrorists guilty of mass murder.

But the killing of thousands of years is not only perfectly acceptable, it is a right enshrined in law. Marriage is no longer exclusively the union of one man with one woman, as God ordained it.

The work of a free society has been severely curtailed by the rights of others not to be offended. Street preachers who are increasingly being reported to the police.

That once consistently produced high standards, particularly here in Scotland, is now no longer admired because of the emphasis on diversity and equality and inclusion, etc.

Even the media is affected, such that people no longer believe all that they read in the newspapers.

The march of godlessness in our society is, of course, the church.

[24 : 15] But no doubt we are where we are, become light. Like Samson who gave up his source of strength, it has become weak and no longer strong. People, churches have compromised with the world.

And like the farmer and his workers in the parable who were asleep in the field, the church has been asleep, allowing its enemy, the devil, to sow his weeds in our government, our churches.

He has even sown his weeds of envy, jealousy, pride, beavers. But all is not lost. It's time for the church to wake up, for judgment to begin with God's household.

The mainstream churches especially, because many churches are doing actually quite well, but the mainstream churches especially, need to begin the process of weeding out from their midst, the false shepherds who don't care for the flock or who lead them astray.

We have this great promise in 2 Chronicles 7.14, If my people, who are called by my name, you know it all, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

[25 : 39] It's down to us. Jesus proclaimed the law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and everyone is forcing their way into it.

When the kingdom of God is truly lived out by the church and preached in the world, only then will we see multitudes once more forcing their way into it.

Amen. Father, we thank you. Thank you for the recent months where we felt that you've been at work in this fellowship.

And Lord, you know our longing and desire to reach out to those round about to impact our community. Lord, we want to be salt and light to the world around us. we want to have receptive hearts to the word of God to be obedient to you so that our lives are fruitful and bring glory to your name. And we just commit ourselves to you now and in the coming months with Craig coming, Lord, that you will continue to work amongst us and do a wonderful thing through us to bring glory to yourself.

[26 : 53] And we do pray for the wider church to wise up, to realise where it's gone wrong and to turn back those who have fallen away to turn back to you and follow you as they should.

So now, Lord, we pray unto him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen. And please join us for tea and coffee and refreshments afterwards.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Thank you.