

# Matthew 13 – The Parables of the Kingdom

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

Luke 6:40

For the casual observer, the parables of Matthew 13 seem fairly straight-forward. The Kingdom of Heaven is compared with several pictures from every day life, such as planting seeds, leavening bread, finding a good deal, and fishing. Indeed, to a child, these parables would seem, nearly, to be the simplest explanation of how the Kingdom of Heaven operated, and yet, there yet exists a body of thought that disagrees. In discussing this difference with a friend of mine, his response was straight-forward: You need to go to Seminary to learn things like that. It wasn't flattering of Seminaries, either.

The problem presented with the parables are precisely what are mentioned on both studies of these issues. Are the things that Jesus is describing about the Kingdom good things, or are they bad? What is the scope? And, how could a thing such leaven be described as good?

Examination of these things, however, must be in the light of Luke 6:40, above. Jesus said, in Matthew 12:28, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.". To Jesus, the presence of the Kingdom (not the Kingdom itself, mind you) was proved by his mighty works. The Kingdom of Heaven, in all the cases Jesus talked about, was a good thing.

In no way could this be referring to a "parenthetical church age", though, which was to be a temporary replacement of the expected Kingdom, because Jesus clearly referred to these things as the "mysteries of the Kingdom". No where is this concept expressed, even though many have attempted to imply its ingression. Verses such as Acts 28:31, where Paul is still preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom at the end of the book, quickly disprove this approach. Rather, Jesus' express intent, from above, is that His disciples walk in the same level and manner as He Himself did, and that this was evidenced in the mighty works that accompanied His preaching of the same. In such a way, the parables of the Kingdom, as well as all of the teachings of Jesus, point directly to ministering in such a life as Jesus did, so that these signs will also follow those who believe.

As we come, therefore, to the parables of Matthew 13, we must be careful with what ears we hear. It is the Kingdom, as evidenced in the Spirit of God (Matthew 12:28), especially in the works of deliverance, that the Kingdom is seen to be present. Certainly, one cannot attribute every apparent miracle to the Spirit of Christ, as we are elsewhere warned of lying ones, but Jesus did say that if they did not believe His preaching, they should have at least believed the miracles (John 10:38). According to Jesus' own words, His works were proof of His message.

Jesus said, specifically of His deliverances that they could not have been of the devil, or else the devil would be divided against himself and would fall (Mark 3:23). So, if the Kingdom that Christ was talking about was made evident by the signs that He wrought, specifically deliverance, what can we make of His statements in places such as Matthew 13?

As every other place that Jesus speaks of The Kingdom, these are all positive, albeit, many also involve the good in the setting next to something bad, such as the wheat beside the tares. Specifically, interpreters have stumbled over Matthew 13:33, "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Leaven, indeed, is often used as a type of sin in the Old Testament. Leaven, in most of the tabernacle sacrifices, was forbidden. Jesus used leaven to reference teaching (Matthew 16:12) and

hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), and Paul also uses the metaphor of leaven as sin in the New Testament as that of evil, urging the church to rid themselves of the leaven of malice and wickedness (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Yet, the Mosaic pattern required leaven in two of the sacrifices: the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:17), or Pentecost, and the Fellowship offering (Leviticus 7:12). As we see the pattern, then, the church at the crucifixion was required to be without any leaven, and, yet, 50 days later, we see leaven was required. The leaven given to them was the Holy Spirit and we see it continues to be the active agent of change within the loaf (the body) through the continual Fellowship Offering of the Assembly of God.

We must be careful what we add to the parable, however, that is not in it. Some have insisted that the “three measures” of meal represent the entire world, or those who would be saved, but this is not inherent in the wording. Consider, for instance, if the woman hid the leaven in the three measures of meal, and they became leavened. Does this immediately mean that every loaf of bread in the entire world is then leavened? Or, even every lump of dough the woman has ever made or will make is? Of course not. Only the dough that receives the leaven is changed. So, if it is not required that the lump of dough represent anything other than that into which the leaven is placed, those who believe.

But, what is leaven? It is an invisible, active agent, working on the whole from the inside, to transform the lump into something else. In the Old Testament, people who sinned in certain ways were required to be either killed or exiled from the camp. For other sins, they had to remain without until they were either purified, or until some other factor changed (like waiting until morning). Looking at this through spiritual understanding, we see the ministry of Jesus, in which He cast out demons from people. Demons were the invisible power behind sin, even as God warned Cain that sin was crouching at his door. Cain, yielding to temptation, opened the door to the spirits of sin, and hence was driven from the ground and made a wanderer in the Earth. In a similar way, we understand today that those who commit certain acts of sin, such as adultery and murder, open the door to spirits of the same, and that evil, unchecked in the a people or group, would affect the whole just as a leaven in bread.

When Jesus came, however, He brought the delivering power of God against the power and work of the devil, and cast out demons with a word. But, He also brought the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which was prophesied by John. What was the Kingdom of God like? It was similar to the power of sin in the world, which was enforced by the demonic realm, because it was also a Spirit. However, unlike the unclean demons which oppressed and afflicted people, the Holy Spirit was to come inside the believer, and make them a new creation, from the inside out. Thus, in the same way that the unseen, but very real, spiritual influence of sin could influence an individual and sometimes an entire nation on a seemingly unconscious, invisible, but direct way, the power of the Holy Spirit within the church could have a far-reaching effect, reaching the hearts open to faith, prepared with repentance, who were either already believing or willing to believe in Christ. Since both the dominion of darkness and the Kingdom of light both work in the spiritual dimension, God had prepared in advance the metaphor of leaven, demonstrating the spiritual through the picture of the natural, with the express intent of Jesus using it in reverse at the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now, some authors at this point, have objected that the Gospel must be doing a miserable job, because the preaching of the Gospel has not done it's particularly well. Rightly, they point out that many people have received the message of the Gospel, but it has produced very little fruit in their lives, thus hardly being said to “leaven the whole lump”. Failing to keep the whole chapter in focus, however, they forget that the first of these parables was that of the four soils. Simply because someone receives the Word does not mean it reaches its fruition. Only the seed on good soil produced a harvest, and that with varied degrees, and so this parable pertains to the possibility of the full transformation and

harvest of the Kingdom. Having already explained that not all will see the full production of these things, for the reasons already given, it does not have to apply to every heart. This is only the operation of the Kingdom within the prepared heart that receives it. Notably, since leaven operates upon the sugars of a dough, it is precisely when the heart is overburdened with the other leavens, the false teachings, the malice, the wickedness, the cares of this life, that the sweetness of one's heart is taken up in other things. It is in this heart that the leaven of the Holy Spirit would find that not a whole-hearted surrender of all things has been made, and that it has only limited resources with which to grow and produce fruit. The fully unleavened bread receives its fullest effect, so that which is most bland, most plain, and most boring, proves to be the most enlightened at the coming of the Spirit, who yields completely to Him.

The other objection is that leaven, something usually thought of as sin, could not possibly be used as a type for the Holy Spirit. This should not upset the reader, though, because Jesus also said in John 6 that unless one ate of His flesh and drank of the blood of the Son of Man, they would not see life, and that would have been a much more offensive statement to the Jew. In fact, it was this statement that made many turn back from following Him in John 6:66. We know, of course, this refers to both communion at the last supper, as well as receiving His Words, though, and so this comparison often skips notice. Jesus seemed to have calculated its effect, though, and turning to the twelve, asked them if they would leave as well. They didn't, because He had chosen them, and He knew that despite the difficulty of the teaching that they would remain.

While some would try to claim that the inclusion of leaven in the Pentecost offering and in the Fellowship offering were the indication that God allows sin in His church, this is beyond ludicrous. The Mosaic Law is the symbol of absolute perfection, and, for the saved soul, the believer in Christ, there remains no sin, but all sin is taken away in Christ. Further, the old nature (not the flesh), is eradicated through death and burial with Christ, and we are created new in Christ, a New Creature (2 Corinthians 5:17), and so that we are called "saints". John said in his first epistle that that which is born of God does not sin. Surely, in the perfection of the Mosaic covenant, there was not even the slightest hint of impurity, so the inclusion of leaven in these two sacrifices, symbolic of the outpouring of Acts 2 and the church, are proof that this "leaven" is good, and is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' explanation, then, was nothing short of explaining the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and His operation within the heart of a believer. It describes, in language available to the natural mind, how the Holy Spirit can be within, and change, the heart of a believer that is following after Christ. No where is the analogy that "leaven puffs up" described as the operation of that leaven in Matthew 13:33, but it is merely the interpretive efforts that prove to fall to the wayside.

Again, the purpose of Jesus in instructing on the parables is to teach the disciples to walk in the same life of the Kingdom that He did. Those who were fully instructed would be just like Him. His goal here was not a side-journey from the Kingdom, as in Luke 22:29, Jesus confers a Kingdom upon His disciples, even as the Father had conferred one upon Him. Rather, from the Scriptures, Jesus is teaching them to walk in the same realm of authority and of power that He did, as demonstrated through His deliverances and mighty works.

Take, then, the parable of the treasure hidden in the field, Matthew 13:44. It says that when a man found it, for joy, he went and sold all that he had, and bought the field. As the leaven was the picture of the Holy Spirit, this is the picture Gospel Faith. All of faith works by revelation (Matthew 16:17). A man can only have true faith for something he has revelation of. This, then, is the picture of Gospel faith. Including salvation, and every other thing of the Kingdom, when a man glimpses something of the Kingdom, with his spirit, he immediately reckons it beyond the worth of the ordinary, natural

existence. This causes him to abandon all things regarding this life, and to procure the apparently mundane setting in which the thing of real value can be obtained.

For instance, as is the common interpretation, Christ did perceive the will of the Father in being the payment for the entire world. Yet, it was precisely upon His own principles that He taught that He did this. Perceiving the perfect will of the Father, even the “joy set before Him” of all that the name above which every name that could be given and everything else of His work would entail, He endured the cross, became man, and became obedient unto death. Thus, He bought the field, to procure the treasure. But, it doesn't stop there. In every avenue of faith, we see this in operation. When we see anything of the Father, we must lose what we have to step into the faith required.

True faith sees the spiritual end, not the natural. It sees with one's spirit a part of the Kingdom of God, the will of God, and perceives it to be better than complications and momentary hardships it would incur. Because the thing perceived is better, being of a higher order (the least in the Kingdom is greater than the greatest without), one naturally and willingly parts from the earthly, mundane, and obeys God. So, too, all the great things in God come from this principle. One is not primarily driven into the higher things of God, but is drawn to by natural desiring. Thus, God works with the human heart to draw them into partnership with Himself.

This is, of course, contingent upon repentance leading to faith. The man with idolatry in his heart will not long perceive faith, if at all. It is impossible to long look at the things of God, John 3:3, if one walks habitually in the covering of sin. The faith that would take root is either not understood, or it is quickly choked out from a lack of root, again, the parable of the soils. Additionally, the one that is too wrapped up in the world would find a hard time separating oneself, and, like the rich young ruler, too often would walk away saddened at the thought of losing so many possessions. Better to be like the shrewd manager, who, realizing he was only a steward about to lose managerial power over the assets he was in charge of, worked quickly with them, before he lost them, to get in favor with those who could help him then.

Repentance leads to faith (Hebrews 6:1), and faith is the sight that sees what is real in the heavenly dimension (Hebrews 11:1). The faith is not the things themselves, only the connection to, or the substance of them. When we perceive the purpose and plan of God, simple, childlike trust with the resultant response towards them is all that God requires. It is not ours to develop strategies, plans, formulas, or even be all that great at anything. Only yielding to the power of the Spirit, already inherent in the Word, makes available the operation of God's kingdom in our midst.

Thus, the Kingdom is like a mustard seed, which, when planted, is the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows, it becomes the largest of all plants. Simple trusting, in a heart like a child, becomes the strongest defense against all the power of the enemy, even to the point of Jesus obeying the Father unto death, the grave, and descending down to the depths of darkness. It was walking in the principles of the Kingdom, the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, coupled with simple obedience, that produced for Him the greatest fruit.

So, we see that the Kingdom's only expression in the Earth is the church, yet, with the parables of the wheat and the tares, we see that everything done by what is called the church is not truly the “church”. The wheat and tares do grow together, and so the simply truth is often blasphemed by those who imitate it alongside those who are true. But, there is never any true mistaking the wheat from the tares in this parable. The wheat are always wheat, and the tares are always tares, and there is no hybrid seed in this picture. That is to say, the Kingdom itself is not corrupted by this influence. No where does it seem to say that the true seed is in some way made evil, but only that, in the standing of the field, the

true and the false must grow, often side-by-side, until the time of harvest.

The lessons of the parables in Matthew 13 are summed up in Matthew 13:52, saying that those teachers of the law who are instructed in the ways of the Kingdom, namely, the Holy Spirit and faith, and the things of God, are like the one who brings out of his storehouse old treasures as well as new. The teachings from the Law, as Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, are useful to equip the minister to be prepared for every good work. As Paul illustrated through the book of Hebrews, it was the law which prophesied the coming of Christ, so that the teacher of the law could look at the pattern of Moses, in the light of Christ, and draw forth the “Old Treasures” contained within.

Yet, when one of these who knows the Old Testament is instructed thus, as above, in the ways of the Kingdom, of allowing the leaven of the Holy Spirit to operate in their lives, of living by faith of what the innermost man sees, and letting that smallest of seeds, that Word of the Kingdom germinate, he brings forth New Treasures as well. Compare this, then, to the other vast body of writing of Paul in the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 12-14 lays out the pattern for gifts, living by love, and proper administration of the gifts in church life. These “new treasures” are not laid out of the pattern of the Old Testament, although they may themselves be contained there, but Paul is bring forth new things, previously unrevealed things, even as he described in Colossians 1:26 and Ephesians 3:5. These were things which had not been previously known, that, through the spirit of prophecy (Revelation 19:10, Isaiah 59:21, et al).

Thus, Jesus' instruction in the Kingdom are as relevant and instructive to us today as they were to Paul and His other followers. Those who have only the Kingdom teaching, without the detailed knowledge of the Law, can only bring forth the New Treasures, brought forth now by the ever proceeding Word of God. But, the teacher of the Law so instructed will always have the greater blessing, because out of the treasures of their heart, once properly taught, they will have the Old as well.

In such a way, we see also that the parables of Matthew 13 are the “mysteries hidden from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:35). They are not “new” things, but they are what has always been, such as, how does one get God to act on your behalf? Jesus said clearly, God gives the power of His Kingdom on behalf of the poor in Spirit, and those persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:3,10). He grants comfort to those who trust in Him who mourn (Matthew 5:4). He grants the things of the Earth to those who don't take it for themselves (Matthew 5:5), such as He did when Hannah only mouthed the words of her prayer at the temple before God granted her to be the mother of Samuel. Here, Jesus further explains these things to His followers, indicating that it is hidden work of the Holy Spirit and the life of faith that made the power of the prophets such as Elijah available. These are the secrets of God's Kingdom, the basis upon which He has always operated from the time of the Garden until now, that Jesus Christ was revealing to His followers as the foundation of His Kingdom.

So, we see the words of Jesus here make greater sense. It was by the power of the Spirit that Jesus cast out demons, and did the works of the Father, and the one who would be fully instructed by these things, the one who would see the things of Heaven as of greater value than the things of the Earth, the things of the heart as greater than the greatest miracle of the flesh (1 Corinthians 13:1-3), who is just like His teacher.

Here, we must remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-27. No where in Scripture does God ever indicate that the Words of Jesus are not fully and completely binding upon the church today. In fact, at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus instructed His followers to teach the new disciples everything He had commanded them (Matthew 28:20). Additionally, Paul, in 1 Timothy 6:3-4a, says that “If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and

with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing;” The Gospels were written down with the express intent of fulfilling Matthew 28:20, not as a history lesson. As both Jesus and Paul attest, it is the “Words in Red” that are the charter, the foundation, and the doctrine of the church today, and for all time (Matthew 24:35). Jesus said that if we love Him, we will obey Him, so if we discard His Words, we make Him a liar. What man, calling Himself a disciple, would not follow in the footsteps and teachings of His master?

It is not the outward working of miracles, of faith, of prophecy, or of the gifts that make one correct in doctrine, in content, and in substance. Jesus said that many would indeed even call Him, “Lord.”, but would be told to depart from Him, because they had never known Him. These even had a demonstration of power, and of miracles, but they did not have love.

Jesus said that the heart that heard and obeyed His words, taking seriously the Sermon on the Mount, specifically, would be the one that endured the storms. Surely, it is only the heart securely built upon Christ, by His Spirit within, responding not out of one's self or own abilities, that is able to withstand the opposition of the world, satan, and the forces of one's own fleshly nature. This is how we stand, by taking seriously His Words, taking them to heart, and living according to them.

The interesting conclusion of these things is that, of necessity, in no way could Matthew 13 be construed to be the development and progression of the church through periods since it's birth. To claim such is to be in direct opposition to the true meaning of these Words. The Kingdom itself is pure, and is always pure, despite being set about by weeds, and any claim to the contrary is to speak ill of Christ, in the end. The tares are not the Kingdom, they are merely there alongside, all the while the wheat 100% wheat. This precludes the possibility of dual meaning in this passage, because, taken the other way that some have wanted to, claiming that the Kingdom suffers corruption and dilution, and that it will reach its conclusion sometime in the future, speaks directly against what these parables actually teach.

This then, must be understood, along with the fact that the Kingdom of God, which is everlasting (Psalm 145:13), has always been since the world began, and had merely come near and been “set up” (Daniel 2:44) in the work of Christ. The instruction of disciples, as all the New Testament writings concur, is in the “Gospel of the Kingdom”, so that there is only ever One Gospel. All other implications aside, this is the true witness of Scripture.

God has, and only ever will have, one Kingdom. It was the Kingdom He had when He gave dominion to Adam in Genesis 1:28, and is the same Kingdom David ruled in when He let him sit upon His own throne (1 Chronicles 29:23). Jesus said the time was fulfilled, referring to Daniel 2:44 and Daniel 9:24-27, among other places, and that the Kingdom was now here (Mark 1:15). This was the Kingdom He Himself operated in (Matthew 12:28), and the one He instructed His disciples in how to live, operate, and believe (Acts 1:8). And, Christ now sits upon the throne of that Kingdom, waiting for His enemies to be made His footstool (Hebrews 10:12-13).

This is the Kingdom that will be one day restored to national Israel (Ezekiel 39:28-29, Acts 1:6), but at which time presently, is not yet restored to them as a people, but is for the Jew first, and also the Greek, to as many who will believe. But, nonetheless, it is Christ's Kingdom, and it is the only one there is.

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