

Matthew 13, Kingdom Parables, Part 1

Faithfulness to the King

There was a recent article about Southwest developing a new plane. And the interesting thing was this plane only had one wing. To everyone's surprise, they couldn't get the plane off the ground. That's a joke, Southwest is smarter than that. Everyone knows in order to get a plane to fly you need two wings. Both wings are critical to a plane being and doing what a plane was created to do.

As disciples, we also have two critical components. Worship and obedience. They are separate but intimately related. We are called to worship God, but worship that does not flow into obedience, is not true worship. Because we obey the thing that we worship. And obedience without worship isn't any better, its self-centered, Jesus is absent from the picture. And of course true obedience we are told to worship Jesus. Though these two concepts are intimately related, its one plane, we can think of them separately to help us diagnose and how to grow in faithfulness to the King. If we don't have both components then we aren't flying, we're not disciples.

So that's what we are after this morning, is worship and obedience in light of King Jesus. To chart out our course as we go through Matthew chapter 13, the first section is a discussion of parables that should lead us to worship. And then, we will move into a parable itself, which will ultimately drive us toward the obedience piece.

Let's pray.

1. THE KING DESERVES WORSHIP

As we open up chapter 13 we enter into a new section in the book of Matthew, and the 3rd main teaching portion. We've had the sermon on the mount, and the sending out of the disciples, Jesus is teaching here but the style and audience shifts. He's teaching the crowds and He teaches in parables.

13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2 And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3 And he told them many things in parables, saying... 34 All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

What are parables? Parables are short stories or illustrations that relay spiritual truth in earthly ways. Make what's unfamiliar familiar by talking about familiar things.

What makes parables difficult is that they are stories, and stories can have a variety of interpretations. We have to be careful not to make them mean whatever we want, but to understand them how Jesus would want us to understand them. Read them in context, look for the plain meaning, check it against other Scriptures.

Well why then, if that's the case with parables, would Jesus speak in this way. Jesus, why wouldn't you just come out and say the truth that you are wanting us to get, like Paul does in his letter to the Romans. Why put it behind a story. That's a great question. The disciples of Jesus thought the same thing... if you look down to v. 10

10 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

So Jesus has been speaking to the crowds, and this little section is like a lockerroom debrief after the game, but Matthew inserts it here as a parenthesis to make sure we as the readers are tracking along. He says the

parables serve two different functions for two different types of people. First, for nonbelievers, parables conceal truth as a sign of God's judgement.

v.13 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.

There's a seeing and there's a seeing. Hearing and really hearing. What's wrong is people's hearts. It's only a sensory experience, the meaning isn't grasped... like listening to a foreign language. Or looking into one of those magic eye posters... those cool posters that you haven't seen in 15 years, I'm not sure where those went. You see the picture but all you see is And this is a sign of judgment, because they don't actually want to understand.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to fit their situation, 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ““You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” 15 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 eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’

Isaiah was commissioned by God to speak His Word but the people would not respond. God would use Isaiah to judge the people. This is to their own condemnation. They heard Isaiah but they thought it was ridiculous, they didn't respond with repentance. And the same problem in Isaiah's day is being fulfilled now in Jesus. God is here, and the people do not repent. Like last week we saw people wanting more signs, more confirmation who Jesus was, but they had all the evidence, they simply refused to believe. They didn't want to believe. If they would only turn, I would heal them! But they refuse.

For nonbelievers then, parables conceal truth as a sign of God's judgement. For believers, parables reveal truth as a sign of God's mercy.

11 And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 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.

To you it has been, what? Given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. But to them it has not been given. The idea in secret revealed or mystery revealed, is the idea that the knowledge gained therein is something that cannot be worked out, or found out, by mere human effort. The mystery has been revealed.

The mystery is that in the last days God's plan to save and redeem the world sent forth His son to be the Messiah, a Messiah who would suffer and die at the hands of sinners, in the place of sinners, so that they might become the righteousness of God, and the riches of this Messiah's life and death and resurrection would extend to all the people's of the earth in a new heaven's and new earth.

Effort can't make you see this about Jesus. A special degree can't help you see this. There's absolutely nothing man can add to the equation to make him see. We are spiritually blind until God opens our eyes. That is why the cross is foolishness to those who don't believe, but for us who do, it is the wisdom of God. We've had our eyes opened! God does use means to open... to see God, draw near to Him, read His word, be with His people... it still ultimately depends on mercy. So rejoice that God has opened your ears. Rejoice also in the absolute privilege...

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Rejoice that God has given you eyes to see and ears to hear. Even Abraham and Moses, and David didn't see what you are seeing, the full gospel. Seeing Jesus and worshiping Jesus is a gift! You didn't earn it. And you don't deserve it. It's a gift. Pride of any sort has no place in the kingdom. How we relate to each other and certainly how we relate to the nonbelievers. The King has been merciful. Our response is worship. Gratitude. Thankfulness. Adoration.

So parables function to fulfill prophecy, in that to nonbelievers, who don't understand them, it's a sign of their judgment. To believers, who do understand, it's a sign of God's mercy.

Now as we turn toward studying the parables, we do so humbly, and prayerfully, that the Lord would grant us understanding. The second aspect of faithfulness to the King... obedience.

2. THE KING DEMANDS OBEDIENCE

If we remind ourselves where we are in the book of Matthew, Jesus, the King, is in the middle of causing quite the stir in Israel. He's come with a message of repentance, warning of judgement. He's proclaiming the Kingdom and He's bringing the kingdom, casting out demons, healing people, and raising the dead. And He's sent out His disciples to spread the Kingdom as well. And all kinds of different reactions are happening to Jesus and His Word. From hostile rejection, to lukewarm acceptance, to full submission and joy. The disciples are probably scratching their heads going, what in the world is going on? If this is the Messiah we've all been waiting for, why is everyone rejecting Him. Is there something wrong with the Messiah? Maybe there is something wrong with the message? This parable answers the question, "Why do people respond differently to the Messiah?" Where Jesus says it has nothing to do with Him or the message, but with their hearts.

13:4... "A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, 6 but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

In the parable, we see four types of hearts that respond to God's word in four different ways:

1. The hard heart

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

So we have a farmer, who is Jesus, scattering seed, which is the word of the kingdom, the message of Jesus. And some of that seed falls on the path where, in that time, you had paths that crossed through people's land. That seed just lands, right on hard ground, and can't get in the soil. It then becomes lunch for the birds, which Jesus says is the evil one.

The hard heart is the heart that doesn't understand the gospel and so therefore rejects it. Is not interested. Doesn't see anything of any value in it. Life is better without it. The gospel is irrelevant.

2. The superficial heart

20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

There's a process here. These folks hear the preaching of God's word and it excites them. They think its great. A lot of initial enthusiasm, Jesus says they receive it with joy. But there's a problem. This person doesn't have any root. There's no soil here so there's no where for roots to grow. In harsh conditions like drought, the roots are what saves the plant. Deep roots have water and nutrients that are supplied to the plant to protect and nourish it. Without the roots, the plant shrivels up and dies from heat.

It's the harsh conditions that cause the death of the plant, what Jesus calls tribulation or persecution. Difficulty on account of the word. Life would be easier if this word were not true. So what do they do, they reject the word and fall away. The word was only superficially in the heart, it did not take real root, and so did not produce fruit. Things get hard and we say, this isn't what I signed up for. I thought following Jesus would solve all my problems and make life really easy. I didn't know it would feel like wearing a cross, an instrument of torture. Peace out you crazy christians.

Like coming back from summer camp. Everyone is about Jesus, its easy, its good. Give it a week and see whose still following Jesus, right? These folks might love a good sermon! They love the show of religion as long as it serves them and nothing is asked of them! Easy Believism. It's easy to raise a hand or walk an aisle. Decisions for Christ are great, commitment to Christ is greater. This is why the Billy Graham folks started working really hard to make sure local churches were involved in the follow up process at crusades. Too easy to celebrate initial excitement. That's not what Jesus is after. Next we see

3. The divided heart

22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

This person hears the word but they aren't willing to give full Lordship to Christ. There is rivalry in the heart. It's a divided heart. They are straddling the fence. One foot in one foot out. Want to follow Jesus but want to follow the world as well.

Jesus gives us an example of what this heart is divided with. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Both of these things, when sought, choke out any fruit that the gospel word would bear in the person's life.

There's so much to care about. Having cares is not the issue. It's putting your hope in those cares. Jesus isn't going to save me, managing and controlling my life is going to save me. Getting the right politician in office, the right health program, my family and my kids education, care, care, care, care... there are cares everywhere, your reputation, what phone to get, all kinds of problems, its endless.

Deceitfulness of riches have a similar affect. You think riches are going to solve your problems. They won't. Having money is not the problem, trusting in money is the problem. And this is what is so disastrous is that because of these cares and deciefulness of wealth, we say no to Jesus. He's not worthy of my full submission and trust and hope. It proves unfruitful.

Danger, choking is slow and subtle. We justify ourselves little by little and become self-consumed.

4. The fruitful heart

23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Here is the person we are after, the fruitful heart. Good soil. The main aspect that Jesus brings out is understanding. The other soils hear the word, but in the fourth soil there is hearing with understanding. This is a deep sort of understanding, an all embracing understanding. It was key in the discussion of parables earlier, understanding has been given. And what does this disciple do that hears and understands, he bears fruit.

We are imaging Christ to the world. To be fourth soil we are accepting the word, treasuring the word with all our hearts, see more joy in the word than in the persecution, more joy in the world the worldly pleasures and wealth. True follower of Christ. All true christians bear fruit. All true followers of Christ persevere through trial and persecution.

I think the first thing we have to ask ourselves in this text is, what soil are we? What type of heart do we have? And that question is settled not by digging in the dirt, but by examining for what? Fruit! Fruit will determine our soil. Fruit determines if we are true believers or not. So we have to ask ourselves, are we producing fruit?

Galatians “19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Fruit is confession of Christ. How do we bear fruit? repenting, abiding in Christ’s love. Not on our own.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing... 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Nonbelievers-> repent

Believers-> this helps us understand people’s response to the gospel. But we also bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Though I think the only christian here is the fourth soil, there is good penetrating questions we have to ask ourselves here. We as christians still have sin in our lives, and we must always be repenting, right? Warring against sin. Therefore, we may look like any one of these other three soils on a day to day basis. Those days where you just don’t want to read God’s word. Rejecting God’s word. Falling in love with the world. Be on guard. And that God is after fruit in our lives. We must obey. And certainly obedience begins with and ends with worship, but worship is evidenced by our fruit, not just confession and raising our hands during a praise song, but how we love our wives, respecting our husbands, lead our family, walk in humility, live with character and integrity, share the gospel with nonbelievers. The Great Commandment and The Great Commission. Love God, Love the Church, Love the Lost.

“Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” We are constantly turning toward Christ and worshipping Him.

Worship and Obey.

God’s word will not return void, it will accomplish its purposes.

Jesus Himself is the True Seed. He is the one who is sows His life by dying, so that in His resurrection He may be the firstfruits of the harvest. We go in confidence to bear fruit for King Jesus! Bear the fruit that He has already purchased!