

# Glad Tidings Church Life Group

Leader: Dan Thomson

## Study of the Gospel of Matthew

Study Guide for Meeting on October 15, 2020

Please read Matthew Ch. 10, 11, and 12 for historical significance. Read Ch.13, "Parables" for discussion.

The notes attached give an overview of the parables of the Kingdom. These include:

- Parable of the Sower
- Parable of the Weeds
- Parables of Growth
- Hidden Treasure
- Good fish, Bad Fish

Having read the chapters during the week, we will be discussing the themes outlined and I will have a series of questions prepared to focus our discussion.

*Read, study, meditate, pray – the road to enlightenment.*

## The Gospels: Matthew 13: Parables of the Kingdom

We need to make sure that our description of the kingdom is compatible with the description Jesus gave. Jesus often preached about the kingdom of God—but what did he say about it? Did he describe peace and prosperity, health and wealth, law and order? Did he get into details of governmental organization?

No, we do not need to know those things. The most important thing we need to know about the kingdom is how we get there in the first place—and when Jesus described the kingdom, that is what he talked about.

Let's begin with Matthew 13, the largest collection of kingdom parables. Several times Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like..." and then he would tell a story. We know many of these parables, but a few details may surprise us.

### Parable of the sower

*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 root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matthew 13:3-9)*

The story is easy to understand. We can picture a man scattering wheat seeds, and we understand about birds, thorns and sunshine. But Jesus had a spiritual purpose in this story, and the disciples found it puzzling. So they asked Jesus, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" (v. 10).

Jesus told them that it was not yet time for people to understand the "secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (v. 11). He is saying that this parable is actually about the kingdom of God—something we see again in verse 19. Most of the people in the crowd were not spiritually responsive (vs. 13-15), and so Jesus was not giving them more than they could handle. But Jesus taught his disciples the spiritual significance of the story—and they have published it for us.

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. (v. 19)

When we preach the gospel, Jesus says, some people do not understand it. That's just the way it is in this world. Don't get upset if people think you are talking nonsense.

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. (vs. 20-21)

Some people like the gospel as a novelty. But then they get bored with it, and when it doesn't solve their problems, they quit. So when we share the gospel, some of the people who respond will eventually fall away. Don't be surprised; that's just the way some people are.

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. (v. 22)

People do not have to be rich to be deceived by riches. All sorts of people can be distracted by the worries of this world, and some drop out for that reason. They are more worried about this world than they are about eternity.

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. (v. 23)

Jesus wants us to be this kind of person. Seeds don't have a choice as to what kind of soil they fall on, but we have a choice as to what kind of soil we will be for the seed. We can choose to respond to the gospel. When trials come, we can choose to stick with the gospel, or to fall away. When life gets boring or worrisome, we can choose whether to bear fruit for the kingdom. That's the kind of message Jesus gives us.

### **Parable of the weeds**

Jesus told them another parable:

*The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.*

*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?"*

*"An enemy did this," he replied. The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" . "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 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." (Matthew 13:24-30)*

Jesus explains the parable for us in verses 37-43. The good seeds are the disciples, spread by Jesus throughout the world. The weeds are bad people, spread by the devil. The bad people are mixed in with the good, and this is what the kingdom of God is like. God allows this; it is part of

his plan. Jesus is describing a world in which Satan is active—the age we live in today. The kingdom of God starts small, like seeds, and it is growing now, and God is waiting to see which plants will bear fruit. Don't be too hasty, he tells his servants. Wait and see. There will be a harvest.

In farming, weeds can never produce grain. But when it comes to the gospel, fruitless folks can be changed. What looks like a weed one day may begin bearing fruit another day. It depends on each person's choice, and the kingdom of God gives people time to choose. But this will not go on forever. There will come a judgment, and the weeds will be removed from the kingdom (v. 41). God lets good and bad grow together, but he doesn't want the bad to stay bad. He wants them to change, and he will keep only the good. (How we become counted as "good" is covered in other places.)

This parable, and the previous one, describes an age in which we have spiritual enemies. It does not describe the world after Jesus returns. Rather, it's a time when enemies snatch away the message that was sown in people's hearts, and cause weeds to grow among God's people. The kingdom of God, as described in these parables, is not a utopia in which everything is perfect. It is a time of struggle, trials, worries and deceit—but it is also a time of growth that leads toward God's harvest.

In these parables, the harvest is at "the end of the age." The harvest is the time when God's people will be resurrected to be with the Lord forever. These descriptions of the kingdom *end* with the return of Christ, rather than beginning with it. These parables describe a kingdom that exists in this age, a kingdom that will also include a future judgment.

When Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, this is the way he described it. He was not preaching about a golden age of peace and prosperity, but a long period of growth in which his disciples are to produce fruit for the kingdom.

### **Parables of growth**

The next story is about growth:

*He told them another parable: "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." (vs. 31-32)*

Here Jesus described the kingdom not just as a seed, but as the *smallest* seed. Jesus is not describing a kingdom that arrives in a blaze of glory—he is describing a kingdom that begins very small. This is not what the Jews expected, but this is the kingdom that Jesus said was near. The kingdom is a story about gradual growth.

In the next parable, perhaps the shortest parable of all, Jesus compares the kingdom to a small amount of yeast.

*Again he asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. (Matthew 13:33)*

When yeast is first mixed into bread dough, it is not very noticeable, but a small amount eventually produces a large result. The kingdom begins small and inconspicuous, but it grows large. In the parable of the wheat, it also produces a crop for harvest.

The small beginning of the kingdom would have surprised Jesus’ listeners. They were hoping that a Messiah would lead the Jewish people to a great victory over the Romans. They were hoping to become an independent nation, with the power of David’s kingdom and the wealth of Solomon’s. But Jesus was announcing that the kingdom must begin in a very small way.

These parables do not describe a future golden age. They do not fit well with a kingdom that begins in a blaze of glory at Jesus’ return. Rather, these parables describe the kingdom of God that exists for many years before the return of Christ. These parables describe a long, slow growth process for the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is not just a seed, and it is not just a fully grown plant. It is the entire story—something small that grows into something large.

### **Hidden treasures**

*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.*

*Again, 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 he had and bought it. (vs. 44-46)*

Again, the story begins with the kingdom small and hidden—but it does not remain hidden. The traditional interpretation of these parables is that when we hear the message of the kingdom, we should be so full of joy that we are willing to give up everything else. That is true. But we can never “buy” the kingdom or earn our salvation. Rather, in these parables (like other parables in this chapter), it may be that *Jesus* is the main character. He is the one who sees hidden treasure in his people (the field) and gives everything he has to purchase the prize. The value may not be evident right now, but it is there.

### **Good fish, bad fish**

*Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When 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. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into*

*the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (vs. 47-50)*

The kingdom of God captures both good and bad people. The message is given to both. They live together and are given a chance to change and grow. Eventually the time comes when judgment is made, and God keeps the good. He loves the bad, he seeks the bad, he wants the bad, but he does not want them to stay bad. But some people choose to stay bad. God gives each person time, but eventually there is a judgment. That is what the kingdom of God is like.

Again, these parables *end* with the day of judgment. When Jesus described the kingdom, he did not describe the world after his return. Rather, he described the world in this age, the age in which we hear the gospel, choose to respond, and choose to be faithful.

When we hear the gospel, we should respond. Though trials come our way, we need to keep our eyes on the goal. Though this life has its worries, we should not let them distract us. Through faith, we enter the kingdom of God, and through faithfulness, we stay in the kingdom of God, and through faith, we bear fruit for the kingdom.

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