

Teen Bible Study Notes: Friday, November 9, 2018

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The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ – Lecture #14

Book and Chapter: Matthew – Chapter 13 (verses 1-33)

MATTHEW 13

Introduction:

Having grown up in Nazareth, Jesus later moved to the town of Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee, where He may have owned a home. It was in the province of Galilee that He worked as a carpenter.

This provides the setting for the first group of parables, which may be called the Galilean parables. This set of parables was given early in Jesus' ministry.

The parables were given in three distinctive sets or groupings. Each set or group of parables had a theme or overall message. And each set became progressively stronger in its meaning and impact.

Each group of parables was presented against a different geographical background and at three distinct points in Christ's ministry. Each set was provoked or stimulated by a different set of circumstances.

The first set of parables consisted of 10 parables. The first six of these are addressed to the people. The remaining four were exclusively for the disciples.

Remember, the account of Jesus' ministry is given in four different biographical books, called gospels.

To gain a truly comprehensive picture of all of Jesus' parables, each of these accounts must be carefully compared. The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are called *synoptics*. That is, they are all thought to have basically originated from a common source, perhaps the gospel of Mark. *[The word "synoptic" means – presenting a summary or general view of the whole; presenting or taking the same point of view – used especially with regard to the first three gospels of the New Testament.]*

Each writer wrote from a somewhat different point of view. The apostle John apparently wrote much later and did not see the need to include much of the material written in the first three books.

For an accurate picture of this first grouping of parables, it is best to compare **Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8**. Notice that Mark includes two parables in this first set that are not found in **Matthew 13**.

The list of parables in the first set is as follows:

Six parables to the people:

- (1) The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3-9).
- (2) The Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30).
- (3) The Lamp Under the Bushel (Mark 4:21-25).
- (4) The Grain of Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32).
- (5) The Kingdom Like Leaven (Matthew 13:33).
- (6) The Seed Cast Into the Ground (Mark 4:26-29).

This represents the set of six parables given to the people. *Note: Matthew 13:34-35 – V 34* “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them. **V35** That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying: *“I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.”*

The first group of six parables was not explained to the people at that time. But Jesus, in private, did personally explain each one to the disciples at a later time. (*Examples: Matthew 13:36 – He explained the parable of the tares of the field. Matthew 13:18 – He explained the parable of the sower to them.*)

Jesus gave the disciples four additional parables. In each case the explanation was self-explanatory. These last four parables in this first set were not given to the people in general. These last four contained a special message within the overall theme pertaining directly to the disciples’ future apostolic ministry.

The remaining four parables:

- (7) The Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44).
- (8) The Merchant Seeking Pearls (Matthew 13:45-46).
- (9) The Net Cast Into the Sea (Matthew 13:47-50).
- (10) The Householder and his Treasure (Matthew 13:52).

These parables were given as lessons to the disciples in particular. Jesus did not obscure the meaning in any way. Rather, He illustrated some important moral and spiritual lessons aimed directly at the disciples.

It is important to realize that the parables were *doctrinal* in nature. **Mark 4:2** “Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching [doctrine].”

Doctrine – is a biblical principle, teaching or truth that is authoritative. Therefore, we cannot underestimate the importance of seeking understanding of the parables of Jesus!

A common theme runs throughout these 10 parables, whether they be addressed to the general public or to the disciples. They all refer to the Kingdom of God. Each parable is designed to motivate those who understand to really want and desire the Kingdom.

They show how the Kingdom will grow and ultimately dominate the entire world. They demonstrate the need to seek Gods' coming Kingdom with every fiber of our beings!

MATTHEW 13

The Parable of the Sower

V1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea [Sea of Galilee].

V2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

Jesus was sitting in a small boat (probably a fishing vessel) near the shore of the lake of Galilee. A large crowd was standing on the gently sloping hillside, which blended into the calm and beautiful Sea of Galilee.

This setting provided a natural amphitheater. The boat functioned as a speaker's platform or stage; and His voice was carried across and reflected by the water to the shore, where the people were standing. The sloped sides of the lakeshore provided a natural acoustical backdrop for the audience. In short, the speaking conditions as found in nature were as nearly ideal as possible in the days before electronic amplification.

Jesus spoke in parables about the Kingdom of God.

As mentioned earlier – in this first group of parables, Jesus gave to the people six parables without any explanation. Later, He privately explained the meaning of all these to His own disciples.

V3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow.

V4 And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

V5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth.

V6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

V7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

V8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty.

V9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

The Purpose of Parables

V10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

V11 He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

Jesus knew that the general populace was not yet ready to receive the deeper truths of His way of life. Had He explained certain parables plainly, they would have been accountable for what they had learned. As James later said: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin” (**James 4:17**).

The truth of God is too precious to be thrown about indiscriminately!

In **Matthew 7:6** Jesus taught us an important principle: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”

He was not calling people “dogs” or “swine”; He was merely illustrating by analogy the reaction of some people to the truth of God.

So generally speaking – Jesus spoke in parables to conceal, or hide, the meaning from the multitudes that followed him. It was not yet time for them to be called.

V12 For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

V13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

V14 And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: *‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive;*

V15 *For the hearts of this people have grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn so that I should heal them.’*

V16 But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

V17 For assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

Jesus always privately explained the intended spiritual meaning of each parable to His disciples. But there are other instances in which the people to whom the parable was addressed also knew

the intended spiritual meaning! It depended upon who was addressed and under what circumstances.

Not all parables were given to the masses of people who followed Jesus. Some were given exclusively to the disciples.

Others were addressed to the religious leaders of the day, the scribes and Pharisees. And they knew exactly what Jesus meant.

This first parable is a simple story liberally laced with local color. It is found in three of the four gospel accounts – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Each gospel mentions a point of two not found in the other accounts. We will use Mark's more concise gospel as our basic reference.

Mark 4:3-8: V3 “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.

V4 And it happened, as he sowed, *that* some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.

V5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth.

V6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away.

V7 And some *seed* fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

V8 But other *seed* fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

Jesus describes a scene very familiar to His audience: A sower went out to sow grain in his field. The seed falls on four different types of ground: 1) the wayside, 2) stony ground, 3) among thorns, and 4) good ground. Each represents a different category of person who hears the Word of God at some point in his life. Each responds differently.

We are not told who *the sower* is, but it is explained that “the sower sows the word of God” (**Mark 4:14**). We must assume that whoever disseminates God's Word (God or one of His human instruments) is the sower.

The seed in the parable, then, represents the Gospel message and all that it includes.

Each person who hears it reacts differently. Not everyone responds with equal enthusiasm. Nor does the Word of God bear the same fruit in each individual it touches.

V18 Therefore hear the parable of the sower:

V19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who **received seed by the wayside**.

Those by the wayside

The people in this first category hear the Gospel message, but they are immediately dissuaded from *doing* anything about it. God's truth is never allowed to take root in their lives. They are easy prey for the devil, who subtly convinces them to disbelieve what they hear (**Mark 4:15** – "...Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts).

There are many ways by which this happens. It could be any number of things, but the result is always the same! The person rejects the Gospel of the Kingdom of God before it gets a chance to take root.

V20 But he who received the **seed on stony places**, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

V21 Yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

On stony ground

These persons advance somewhat further than those in the first category. Their initial reaction to the Word of God is enthusiastic. They are happy to hear the truth preached. They may even become baptized. (**Acts 2:41** "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized...)

But unfortunately, their enthusiasm soon wears thin. They "...have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble" (**Mark 4:17**).

Psalms 119:165 "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble."

These babes in Christ never allow their spiritual roots to go down quite deeply enough to draw on the pure nourishing water of God's spiritual power (**John 7:38-39; Acts 1:8**).

When persecution comes along, they are not strong enough to withstand. They have no persevering power in the face of the ridicule of those who do not share their beliefs.

Such people are only willing to obey God as long as it does not cost them anything in terms of personal prestige and respect. They are willing to compromise the Word of God rather than suffer for it.

V22 Now he who received **seed among the thorns** is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Among thorns

The third type of person progresses somewhat further. They too begins to bear fruit and live a life of obedience to Christ. Their life changes as they yield to the Word of God. But they too have a hang-up. At some point in their Christian life, “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things entering in choke the word, and it, becomes unfruitful” (**Mark 4:19**).

In order to become unfruitful, a person must have at one time been fruitful. Here is someone who has actually begun to bear substantial fruit as a result of God’s Word. They have made spiritual progress. This person may have been in the Church for some time.

But sooner or later, plain old materialism or sensuality creeps in and smothers them spiritually.

There are many pitfalls that can tear a person away from the abundant life to which God has called them. It could be money, the desire of power, another woman or man, a job or an inordinate desire of any kind. Whatever it is, it diverts one from his life in Christ – choking out the influence of God’s Holy Spirit and any further bearing of good fruit.

For this reason the apostle Paul warned the Colossians about drifting into materialism: “Set your mind on things above, not no things on the earth” (**Colossians 3:2**).

V23 But he who received **seed on the good ground** is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

On good ground

This category describes people who are converted and who make continual growth and progress in the faith. They bear the good fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

But not all bear the same amount of fruit. Some are much more productive than others. Many do not realize their maximum potential as Christians. It is Christ’s will that we BEAR MUCH FRUIT! And those who are closest to Jesus Christ bear the most fruit!

John 15:5 “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Which category are you in?

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

V24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;

V25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.

V26 But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

V27 So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’

V28 He said to them, ‘An enemy had done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’

V29 But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.

V30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’

IMPORTANT NOTE: The explanation to this second parable is found in **verses 36-43**. We will explain it when we get to these verses.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Insert the third parable here – *Light Under a Basket* – from *Mark’s gospel account*:

Light Under a Basket

Mark 4:21-25: V21 Also He said to them, “Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?”

V22 For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.

V23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.

V24 Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given.

V25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”

This parable had an especially significant meaning for the disciples. Jesus had told them earlier: **Matthew 10:26-27: V26** “Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. **V27** Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.”

The Gospel message is the light that shines in a dark place. Christ was the Light of the world (**John 1:9**).

John 1:9 “That was the true Light [Jesus Christ] which gives light to every man coming into the world.”

Christians are to light the world with their example and with their *message* (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Matthew 5:14-16: V14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

V15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house.

V16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

It is the *work* and *duty* of God’s Church to proclaim the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness!

Christ illustrated this important point by showing that if a person bought a candle it would be ridiculous to hide it (or snuff out its light) beneath a bushel basket! So it is with the message of the Kingdom. The message is not something for a Christian to keep to himself. It is a message that must be proclaimed! As Paul said, “...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (**I Corinthians 9:16**)!

God has revealed to His people truths that were kept secret from the beginning of time. Even the mighty prophets of old were not granted the same insight into the plan of salvation that lay members of God’s Church may have today.

Even *angels* desire to look into some of the things we may readily know (**I Peter 1:10-12**).

I Peter 1:10-12: V10 “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you.

V11 Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

V12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into.”

I Corinthians 2:9-10: V9 “But as it is written: ‘*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*’

V10 But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”

Can we hide such truth and light under a “bushel”? God forbid!

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Now we come to the fourth parable:

V31 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,

V32 Which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

Concerning the Mustard Tree

Critics have taken great exception to Jesus’ mention of the mustard plant and its seed in this parable. Much of the problem is a lack of understanding of what Jesus actually said. Not only do these critics question Jesus’ own intelligence, but also the entire veracity and reliability of the Word of God. These same people claim the following: 1) First – the mustard plant was not the largest of trees, they have said, in fact it is not a tree at all. 2) Secondly – certainly birds could not build nests in it, and, 3) Third – its’ seed is not the smallest of seeds.

So what is the correct explanation?

Although various other identifications have been proposed – most modern commentators agree that the plant of Jesus’ parables was the ordinary black mustard – *Brassica nigra*.

It is an annual herb that grows up rapidly each spring from a tiny seed and reaches a height of three or four, or even at times 10 to 15 feet. The leaves are large, the flowers are yellow, and the small, blackish seeds grow in linear pods.

One must not overlook that Jesus was speaking of an agricultural plant and a seed that was sown, not a tree (**Matthew 13:31**). This should be obvious by the context in **Matthew 13**. The mustard seed parable follows the parable of the sower and the seed and the parables of the tares sowed by the adversary.

Matthew and **Mark** describe the mustard plant as an herb (not a tree as we think of trees), and the word signifies a garden *herb*, a cultivated plant.

Mustard, of course, was cultivated for its seeds, which were ground up for commercial mustard and also for its oil. Of all *garden* seeds, its seeds were indeed the smallest, and of all *garden* annuals, the grown mustard plant was the largest.

Even today in Palestine the mustard is a common weed seen projecting far above the heads of the grain, exceeding in height of all other plants in the field.

In the autumn the stems and branches become hard and rigid and have more than enough strength to bear the weight of the small birds that are attracted by their fondness for the edible seeds.

It is not necessary to suppose that these birds actually build nests in the branches, as translated in the Revised Standard Version. The word (rendered in the King James Version – *lodge*) simply means *light upon*. (Note that **Mark 4:32** reads “under the shadow of it.”)

However, people have claimed to have seen nests, built either late in the season or in the spring in a dead skeleton of a previous year's plant. This tree-like plant with a stem the size of a man's arm could also justifiably be regarded as a "tree".

This parable shows that the preparation for the Kingdom of God has the smallest of beginnings. Yet that ruling Kingdom will ultimately fill *all* the earth.

Daniel wrote: **Daniel 7:14** "Then to Him [Christ] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed."

The saints will inherit this Kingdom with Christ.

Daniel 7:18 "But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."

What a magnificent destiny! What incredible glory! This is the marvelous future of all true Christians – to inherit *all* things as part of the universe-filling Kingdom of God.

But look how small it all began! In all of Old Testament times, only a comparatively small number of people were called to inherit the Kingdom of God. Men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Daniel and David. Women like Esther, Rahab, Sarah and others.

It was not until shortly after the death and resurrection of Christ that substantial numbers of people were called. And even then the number of people that have been called are only a small fraction of all the humans who have ever lived!

Eventually billions of people will be added to the Kingdom, or Family, of God! When it's all said and done the Kingdom will *fill the earth!* How appropriate is the parable of the tiny mustard seed that grows into a large shrub or bush in which the birds of heaven find shelter. That tiny seed produces a plant many thousands of times its own size – and so it will be in the Kingdom of God.

The Parable of the Leaven

V33 Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

The fifth parable illustrates essentially the same point as the previous one, but by a different analogy.

Leaven is the substance used to make bread dough rise by expansion. Most homemakers will be familiar with its qualities. Even those who have not used yeast, have at least made cakes, biscuits, pancakes or a similar product with baking powder, which is also a type of leaven. A *little* leaven is all that is necessary to leaven the whole lump of dough (**Galatians 5:9**).

So it is with the Kingdom of God. What God has started with a comparative few at this time will ultimately result in the entire earth being blanketed with the knowledge of God.

Isaiah 11:9 “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

We will continue with our discussion of this first set of parables next Friday evening.