



# Session 13

## ACCESS GRANTED

Jesus reveals the secrets of His kingdom to His followers.

### MATTHEW 13:1-13

<sup>1</sup> On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. <sup>2</sup> Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat down, while the whole crowd stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup> Then He told them many things in parables, saying: “Consider the sower who went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> As he was sowing, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup> Others fell on rocky ground, where there wasn’t much soil, and they sprang up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered. <sup>7</sup> Others fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them.



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8 Still others fell on good ground and produced a crop: some 100, some 60, and some 30 times what was sown. 9 Anyone who has ears should listen!” 10 Then the disciples came up and asked Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” 11 He answered them, “Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them. 12 For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13 For this reason I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand.”

*Note the distinctions in where the seed was sown and how that impacted the crop production.*

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## FIRST THOUGHTS

Stories capture our imaginations, helping us remember and connect the dots. Having good information is important, but reading a story related to the information will help you to remember it better.

***Recall a story or book that helps you remember some timeless or important truth. What is the truth, and how does that story or book help you remember that truth?***

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Jesus was the premier storyteller. He made illustrations and stories a major feature of His preaching and teaching. We refer to these stories as parables. Jesus told parables partly due to the fact that they made truth understandable and memorable. His parables used things with which His hearers were familiar in order to convey to them spiritual truths that were not familiar. When people heard the words of a parable, they were able to envision the story or analogy. As has often been said, Jesus used parables to turn people’s

ears into eyes. What they heard formed mental pictures they could see. The first parable in a series of seven parables in Matthew 13 serves as an apt introduction to Jesus' teachings. This parable about a sower and the soil describes ways people responded to His teaching.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### **MATTHEW 13:1-58**

Matthew 13 records the third major teaching section in the first Gospel. We already have covered two earlier teaching passages: the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5–7) and the instructions He gave for the ministry of His disciples, sometimes referred to as the Mission Message (chap. 10). Jesus delivered the third discourse beside the sea. It might be termed His Kingdom of Heaven discourse. The crowd that gathered became so numerous that Jesus pushed out from shore in a boat from which He spoke to the multitude.

This discourse is distinctive in that it is composed of seven parables: the sower, the wheat and the weeds, the mustard seed, the yeast, the hidden treasure, the priceless pearl, and the net, ending with a conclusion that uses the parable-like illustration about the master of a house. A further unique feature of the discourse is that it contains Jesus' own interpretation of two of the parables: the sower (vv. 18-23) and the wheat and the weeds (vv. 36-43).

Additional features of the discourse that are noteworthy are Jesus' explanation for His use of parables as a teaching technique (vv. 10-17) and the connection Jesus made between prophecy and His use of parables (vv. 34-35).

Jesus ended the discourse with what some count as an eighth parable (but which may be simply a concluding analogy) of a storehouse that contains things that are new and those that are old (vv. 51-53). His use of the analogy serves as a reminder that the parables are both a fresh way of presenting truths taught elsewhere in the Bible and a means of presenting new truth about God's kingdom.

At the conclusion of His discourse about the kingdom, Jesus departed for His hometown of Nazareth, where He met rejection in the very synagogue that likely had been a major scene in His formative years in Nazareth (vv. 54-58).



# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## A CROWD (MATT. 13:1-3a)

### VERSES 1-2

**<sup>1</sup> On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. <sup>2</sup> Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat down, while the whole crowd stood on the shore.**

Jesus left a *house* to go to a place *by the sea*. Presumably, the house was the one to which His mother and brothers had come seeking to speak to Him (see 12:46-50). While He was sitting beside the sea, a crowd gathered in such number that Jesus found it necessary to enter a boat, push out from the seaside, and address the crowd that ***stood on the shore***.

In that day, teachers usually sat while speaking and their audience stood while hearing, so Jesus ***sat*** in the boat to speak to the standing crowd. Even if we were to assume that Jesus left the crowded house in order to find solitude at the seashore, we should take note that whenever a crowd assembled Jesus was willing to share His message with them. That being the case, He set a worthy example of putting His personal desires aside to minister to the spiritual needs of others.

### VERSE 3a

**<sup>3a</sup> Then He told them many things in parables, saying:**

Jesus spoke ***many things*** to the crowd by means of ***parables***. What is a parable? Some parables are stories, complete with characters and a storyline, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). However, not all parables are stories. Some parables are very brief, consisting of a simple analogy, such as the parable about the blind leading the blind in Luke 6:39, which reads more like a proverbial saying than a story parable.

Whatever their length or type, parables usually involve some kind of analogy in which something very familiar or common is made the vehicle by which to express spiritual truths. Jesus was a master at taking something common to His hearers' experience and showing how it could illuminate spiritual matters. This is what He did with His parable about a sower and the soils upon which he cast seed.

## A PARABLE (MATT. 13:3b-9)

### VERSE 3b

**3b “Consider the sower who went out to sow.**

Jesus invoked the image of a typical first-century farmer sowing seed in a field. The image that would have formed in the hearers’ minds was not that of neatly plowed rows across the field. Rather, they would have envisioned a sower with a bag of seeds walking across the field while scattering or broadcasting the seeds. Having covered the field with seeds, the farmer would then likely go back over the field scratching or plowing the seeds into the soil. Jesus proceeded to turn attention not to the sower or his seeds but to the different types of soil found in the field. This focal point has led some to refer to this as the parable of the soils.

### VERSE 4

**4 As he was sowing, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate them up.**

People often took shortcuts by walking across fields, thereby creating paths where the soil became pressed down and hardened by the sowing time of the next growing season. The technique of scattering seed did not lend itself to carefully avoiding the compacted pathways. The sower simply covered the whole area with seeds. Seeds lying exposed on the hardened surface of *the path* drew the attention of *birds* who found delight in devouring them.

Jesus explained this parable in verses 18-23. He interpreted this type of soil as the person who “hears the word about the kingdom and doesn’t understand it” (v. 19). Like the birds in the field, “the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart” (v. 19). The soil that is packed down and hard produces no fruit.

### VERSES 5-6

**5 Others fell on rocky ground, where there wasn’t much soil, and they sprang up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. 6 But when the sun came up they were scorched, and since they had no root, they withered.**

Some of the seeds landed on shallow soil that had a rock shelf just below it. In the shallow topping of soil the seed would sprout but



would be unable to sink roots into the ground. The result would be the withering of the young sprouts under the scorching sun. Again, no harvest would result from those seeds. In His later explanation, Jesus compared the rocky soil to hearers who made a hasty but shallow response. Without deep heart commitment, those hearers would stumble in the face of pressure or persecution (vv. 20-21). Such shallow hearers would not become fruitful.

#### VERSE 7

**<sup>7</sup> Others fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them.**

Whatever clearing of the field might have been done, roots of thorn bushes remained in the soil awaiting their time to sprout and grow. Sprouts of grain from the good seed would be no match for the thorn bushes. The **thorns** would simply choke out the grain. No harvest would be gathered from such areas in the field.

Jesus explained the thorns as representative of “the worries of this age and the seduction of wealth” (v. 22) that choke out and make unfruitful the truths of the kingdom.

#### VERSE 8

**<sup>8</sup> Still others fell on good ground and produced a crop: some 100, some 60, and some 30 times what was sown.**

Without distinguishing the proportion of seed that fell on the unfruitful places in the field from that which fell on good ground, Jesus emphasized the productivity of good seed planted on **good ground**. Presumably, the majority of seeds sown in a field would be aimed at good soil. To make His point, Jesus’ parable assigned varying percentages to the potential harvest, some seeds yielding a crop **100** times more than the volume of seeds sown, others **60** times more, and yet some **30 times** more. By means of the varying percentages, Jesus’ message conveyed the reality that positive responses to the truths of the kingdom might vary from person to person.

Jesus’ explanation of the parable included a significant difference between the fruitful hearers and the unfruitful ones. Everyone in the crowds that gathered heard His words. Those who identified with the impacted paths, the shallow soil places, and the thorn-infested parts

all heard His words. Of the fruitful hearers, however, He said they both heard and understood the message (v. 23).

#### VERSE 9

**<sup>9</sup> Anyone who has ears should listen!”**

Jesus ended the parable with an admonition that those with **ears** should **listen**, not to catch the mere sound of His words but to understand their meaning. Jesus frequently attached this same appeal to His words (Matt. 11:15; 13:43; Luke 8:8; 14:35). By phrasing the admonition to **anyone who has ears**, His warning was for all who were in the crowd. They all possessed ears. The problem with some in the crowd was that they were not open to receive and act on His message.

***What principles for sharing spiritual truth can be found in this parable?  
How can believers follow these principles in today's world?***

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#### KEY DOCTRINE: *The Kingdom*

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King.

**A REASON** (MATT. 13:10-13)

#### VERSES 10-11

**<sup>10</sup> Then the disciples came up and asked Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” <sup>11</sup> He answered them, “Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them.**

Apparently, after Jesus had finished a day of speaking to great crowds beside the sea, He was alone with the disciples. They had a question: **“Why do You speak to them in parables?”** In responding, Jesus referred to the **secrets of the kingdom of heaven**. We think of secrets



as information kept private from others. In the New Testament the idea is rather different. Sometimes referred to as mysteries, secrets are truths that can only be known as God reveals them. Humans cannot attain God's truths by philosophical reasoning or other mental activity. Truths about God's kingdom come only as God makes them known, as He did through Jesus' ministry of teaching and through inspired prophets and disciples writing other books of the Bible.

The disciples had committed themselves to Jesus and His message. That prior commitment became for them the open window through which they could begin to see and understand God's revealed truths about His kingdom. That being true, Jesus declared that it was **given** to them **to know** the secrets of the Kingdom. Many others, as demonstrated throughout the previous chapter, lacked such a commitment. Hence, it had **not been given to them** to understand the same revealed truth that committed hearers understood. The lack of faith and commitment closed the window to their understanding. That closed window was but the beginning of divine judgment on unbelief; hence, parables were serving to conceal truth from them, while at the same time serving to clarify truth to committed followers like the disciples.

Strange as it may seem, Jesus chose to teach in parables because parables could simultaneously reveal truth and conceal it. People of faith could perceive spiritual truth embedded in the everyday analogies that Jesus employed. Those without faith heard interesting stories and analogies but missed the embedded truth. Thus, Jesus' method of teaching truth through parables was used to give little or no insight to hearers who persisted in unbelief and resistance.

#### VERSE 12

**<sup>12</sup> For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.**

The principle behind using parables to reveal truth to committed followers was simply that **whoever has, more will be given**. Those who brought hearts of faith to the hearing of parables would have more truth added to their lives. The reverse of the principle is that one who lacks genuine commitment finds that whatever inkling he or she

might have into God's revealed truth will soon find even that bit of insight fading away. A bit of truth not fully received and acted on is ultimately lost and forgotten.

**VERSE 13**

**<sup>13</sup> For this reason I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand.”**

By restating the concealing purpose of His parables, Jesus underscored the sad plight of His critics. He used the paradox of people seeing, but not really seeing, and hearing, but not really hearing. He indicted such members of his audience over their unwillingness to see, hear, and understand the revealed truth of God He had come to deliver. The issue was their hard-hearted unwillingness to receive God's truth embodied in Jesus and taught by Him.

***What explanations might be given for why some hearers of the Word of God do not give evidence of understanding it and letting it make a difference in their lives?***

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**BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.***

Look up the word *parable* in a Bible dictionary (either print or online). How is *parable* defined? Can you find any examples of parables in the Bible other than those taught by Jesus? What are the common themes of Jesus' parables? Identify any significant principles that should be followed in interpreting parables.

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## IN MY CONTEXT

Jesus shared God's truth whenever a willing group gathered to listen. Then, as now, when the gospel is shared, the responses will vary. Nonetheless, by the grace of God, everyone should be given the opportunity to consider Jesus' teachings, even those who reject Him.

***Describe how you typically present the gospel message to others. What role do stories have in what you share? What stories do you use to more clearly communicate the truth of the gospel?***

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***Determine how your Bible study group could serve as an encouragement for sharing the gospel. How can the group hold each other accountable for sharing spiritual truth with others?***

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***List the names of people you know who need to know about Jesus. Record the steps you need to take to make it possible for them to hear the gospel.***

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## MEMORY VERSE

Anyone who has ears should listen! —Matthew 13:9