

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 48, Chapter 13 Continued

We began last week's lesson with a somewhat long dissertation about the true nature of parables because in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13 is where Christ's use of parables begins in earnest. I'll briefly review.

One of the most important elements of parables is that they belong only to the Jewish world. That is, parables are a product of Jewish culture, even though literature of similar nature (but not the same) occurred sparingly in other cultures as well. What separates true parables from all others is the inclusion of God. God's will and God's nature and His character are at the center of parables. Another important element is that although the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament (where parables appear) are in the Greek language, nonetheless all parables were originally constructed in Hebrew, reflecting their thoroughly Jewish origin. Thus as I have demonstrated on numerous occasions, translations from Hebrew to Greek can, at times, distort what was intended in the original. And yet another translation from Greek to English (or other languages) adds another layer of difficulty that can further obscure the intended meaning of a passage. This reality creates a particular conundrum when dealing with parables.

Another important element of parables is that they have one, and only one, aim or moral. That is, parables are not like allegory, which gives the interpreter a wide range of possible meanings, all of which may be considered as equally worthy and valid. Due to the use of allegorical Bible interpretation within Christianity, going back as far as the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, and having become the main form of interpretation and preaching of the Bible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then of course Yeshua's parables get lumped in with this allegorical method and so are automatically subjected to the possibility of having their original, intended

meaning blocked from view.

Approaching Jesus's parables as though they are Jewish allegory also comes from the academic mindset that the Greek word for parables, which is **paraboles**, and the Hebrew word that it is translating, which is **mashal**, means riddles. While there is a kernel of historical truth to this claim, in fact it overlooks that over time the meaning of **mashal** evolved (as do words and their meanings in all languages). In Old Testament times one of the several meanings of **mashal** was indeed "riddle". And the meaning of riddle is a short story that has a hidden or mysterious meaning. But that had changed by Yeshua's day such that **mashal** mostly meant parable in the Jewish sense of it. In Jewish culture, as evidenced by the hundreds of rabbinical parables from the 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> centuries that can be examined in detail, parable in no way meant short story with a hidden or mysterious meaning. Quite the opposite. A parable was meant to explain; it was a relatively simple way to reduce a complex issue to something understandable, and to get across a single point to a common Jewish person. But because so many popular Bible scholars dismiss the Hebrew and Jewish nature of the Bible, and don't want to acknowledge the 100% Jewish nature of Jesus, they have little interest in 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish society, and even less knowledge of Hebrew or rabbinical culture. Therefore their nearly universal mantra is that parables are essentially riddles with nearly unlimited solutions; they are anything but.

Before we move on, perhaps the most important element of Christ's parables for us to apprehend is that they are meant to illustrate the nature and character of God. They are intended to help us all to understand what God is like. In biblical New Testament context, parables were an attempt by Jewish teachers and rabbis to help everyday Jews understand what our super-natural God is like by painting word pictures using the natural things that surrounded them to make a comparison. Jesus once went so far as to say:

**CJB John 14:9 *Yeshua replied to him, "Have I been with you so long without your knowing me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"***

While this statement is not a parable, it is certainly aiming for the same goal: to explain what God is like. It is Yeshua trying to help Philip get a better mental picture of God the Father by comparing Him to something tangible in nature; something that Philip can see and touch... the person of Yeshua.

The first parable we encounter (which is most popularly known as the Parable of the Sower) begins in Matthew 13:3. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 13.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 13:1 - 17**

Because of the non-Jewish, allegorical worldview of Christian Bible commentators and teachers, this parable is usually called the Parable of the Sower. In fact the more appropriate title should be something like the Parable of the Soils, or perhaps the Parable of the Hearers. This is because the focus of this parable is not at all on the Sower; not even on the seed per se. Rather the parable's focus is on the 4 types of soil...the hearers... and thus 4 different cases of the soil's reaction, response, and interaction with the seed that is spread upon it.

After finishing the parable, in verse 10 the disciples say to Yeshua: "Why are you speaking to them in parables?" Yeshua answers their question in verse 11 with: "Because it has been given to you to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it has not been given to them." He says more but I want to deal with only these 2 verses for the moment.

If a person has the mindset that a parable is a riddle with a hidden meaning, then verses 10 and 11 sure makes it sound as though they are correct. But as I have demonstrated to you, that mindset does not represent the Jewish mindset of the 1st century, and therefore not Christ's mindset, and so this does not at all mean that what He has said to the crowd is a cruel riddle that the common folk cannot possibly fathom. So what does Christ mean by His response to the disciples' question of Him when He says that the secrets of Heaven are for them, but not for the others in the crowd? Let's work our way through this by beginning with the logical: why on earth would Jesus tell the crowd this parable if His intent was that they wouldn't understand its meaning? Was it to tease them? Was it to make them feel bad for their ignorance? Was it to sort of punish them? Was it to make them look in awe at Him, thinking that only He knows the meaning of this fascinating short story?

And if He told this parable for none of these reasons (as I claim) then what does Christ mean that His disciples are meant to know the meaning of the parable, but the crowds aren't? So the first question we must ask ourselves is: what's the difference between Yeshua's disciples and the crowd? It is only that the disciples believe and trust in Christ (not as Savior, yet, but as a messenger from God that

brings with Him the Kingdom of God). In contrast, the crowds don't believe any of this. Believing surely must have entailed repentance of sins; something that was at the core of Yeshua's purpose and intent, but it was not what the crowds did (thus we read of Christ's disappointment in their general response to Him). Therefore, by trusting in Him Yeshua's disciples became equipped to penetrate the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but the others who are not His disciples could not. Still, since the crowds are not able to comprehend the deeper things, Yeshua isn't going to abandon them. Rather, He will teach them using simple parables, which are meant for those with lesser ability to understand due to their lack of trust in Him.

Remember: parables are neither mysterious riddles nor direct exegetical Torah teaching. They are word pictures to help the common man understand what God is like, and also what His Kingdom is like. Most of the crowd listening to Jesus would have understood the effects of some seed falling upon the various kind of ground. Simple.

In verse 12 Yeshua continues explaining to His disciples His reason for speaking to the crowds in parables. He puts it in terms of a proverb. It is that anyone who has something will be given more until that person has plenty; but for someone who has nothing, even that will be taken away from him. Mysterious? Hardly. Any common Jew living in that era would understand. This is an illustration based on what everyone observed and lived out. In the ***P'shat*** sense a person who has something (meaning, a well-off person) will of course use his resources to acquire more. But a person who has nothing (a poor person) has no means to acquire more. So those who have nothing are vulnerable to have what little they do possess taken from them. It works similarly in the spiritual sense. In the ***Remez*** sense having a goodly amount of trust in God opens the door for even more trust. Having a deficit of trust in God likely means that whatever little trust you have will eventually evaporate and you'll have none.

It is the natural state of human beings to have no knowledge of the spirit world, or of what God is like, and especially not of what is coming to the world in the future... the End Times. In the current context, typical humans (Jews for the time being) have no means to understand, or to even know about the existence of, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The only way ever for a human to know the divine truth is when it is a gift from God. While this gift is freely given, that doesn't mean it comes without preconditions. And the precondition is that one is to trust in God and His Son, Yeshua. How does this happen? One must seek God, hear the

message (the seed) from a messenger (the sower) of the Good News, and then act upon it. There is no other way.

To help you visualize this point I want to tell you a story about my wife, Becky's, father who is long ago deceased. One time we were visiting him in West Virginia and staying in his home. We happily noticed a Bible sitting on the end table, but also knew through his son who lived just down the road that he hadn't been to a Church for so long that no one in the family ever recalled when he might have. Becky's father was an intelligent, well educated man. He was a college graduate and retired as a school teacher. When she asked her father about the Bible, he said he had tried reading it more times than he could count, but it frustrated him because he couldn't make sense of it. It was like gobbledy-gook. He of course could read the words, but their meaning so eluded him that he would just give up.

Some years later, just weeks before he passed away... sensing, I think, that his time was very near... he went with his son to the family church, went forward, confessed his sin and his condition before God, and was saved. We heard of it, and a couple of weeks later made a trip there to speak with him and, I suppose, see for ourselves. He seemed like a different man. But what was really amazing was that we looked and saw that same Bible on the end table, and when I asked him about it, he said that he reads it daily because suddenly those words made sense to him and he understood.

I have read the works of more than a few Bible commentators who didn't believe in God or the spiritual realm (as strange as that may seem, it isn't all that unusual any longer). They approached the Bible mostly intellectually, often from a language translation viewpoint, trying to get the words exactly right, and then would offer their conclusions. Often I was stunned at how these brilliant scholars could uncover a better understanding of a word or phrase but get the meaning of it so wrong. The reason for this irony is best summed up in what Jesus said to His disciples: "It has been given to you to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it has not been given to them". Davies and Allison in their commentary on Matthew put it this way regarding what Yeshua said verse 12: "Knowledge is rewarded by knowledge. Ignorance is rewarded by ignorance.... Like begets like." If you don't worship the God of the Bible, you have no chance of obtaining the meaning of the Holy Scriptures because God won't gift you with the ability. And since Christ's advent (when the Kingdom of Heaven arrived) unless you trust in His Son, Yeshua, you have no chance of obtaining the

meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven and what lay ahead in the future.

Further, as those of you who are studying with Torah Class know, trusting Christ enables you... even encourages you.... to learn and understand the deeper mysteries of the Kingdom and to prepare for the things that are coming; whereas those who don't trust Him may listen, but they hear only nonsense. And even more in tune with the context of Matthew 13, when you believe and follow manmade doctrine or tradition as though it was God's Word (which the Pharisees do), you, too, will not be able to comprehend the truth about the Kingdom and what is coming (even though you think you might). This is more than sad; it is dangerous to your spiritual health and to your eternal future.

In verse 13 Yeshua offers yet another reason for why He speaks in parables to the Jewish crowds that don't trust in Him. He paraphrases Isaiah 6:9 when He says: "They look without seeing, and listen without hearing or understanding." Then continues by saying that these unbelieving crowds are a fulfillment of Isaiah 6; specifically verses 9 and 10. Here is how it is worded from Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Isaiah 6:9-10** <sup>9</sup> *He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Yes, you hear, but you don't understand. You certainly see, but you don't get the point!'"* <sup>10</sup> *"Make the heart of this people [sluggish with] fat, stop up their ears, and shut their eyes. Otherwise, seeing with their eyes, and hearing with their ears, then understanding with their hearts, they might repent and be healed!"*

What we read in Isaiah seems to say something like: "Because your eyes are shut and your ears are stopped up (at your own willful choice) than I (God) am going to punish you by making sure it stays that way so that you never repent and therefore you will never come to understand". But that isn't what Christ seems to be saying. In His loose quote of Isaiah, He seems to be saying that because the people are willfully blind and deaf, then the repenting they ought to do naturally doesn't happen. In other words, the way Isaiah 6 says it, it is God intervening to prevent those Jews who have chosen to be deaf and blind to the divine truth from ever repenting and thus finding the truth; versus Christ making it that it is those Jews who are deaf and blind to divine truth that are doing it to themselves; but if they choose to stop being deaf and blind then they can repent and be made whole. And when made whole they'll finally be able to grasp the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven and the future times.

But, says Yeshua in verse 16, you (the disciples) are different than them. You are blessed with open eyes and open ears. And even more the disciples "hear". That is, they **shema**... they heard and then they acted upon the knowledge given to them as a gift from God as a result of becoming followers of Christ. The disciples are therefore given to see the coming to fruition (before their own eyes) what the Prophets prophesied so long ago, but were never privileged to see it come about. And even more He says they are learning about End Times things that their eyes may never behold. I also want to highlight that it is because the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived (with Yeshua as the center of that arrival) that suddenly things about the future...the End Times... **can** be known. That is why, as Believers and therefore members of the Kingdom of Heaven in the 21st century, we have the opportunity to know quite a lot about the End Times. Remember: but for a precious few, the Jewish people to this day still don't understand that the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived. For them the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven is marked by the entrance into a golden age for a revived Israel. It is a physical phenomenon marked by the surfacing of a warrior-leader like David as the Messiah, that leads Israel through military action to become a widespread and powerful kingdom that is the envy of the world.

Evidence of this important understanding that we will NOT have the correct knowledge of God's Kingdom unless He gifts it to us, and this by means of trusting His Son AND then diligent pursuit of this knowledge, is fundamental to the thoughts of later Apostles and writers, which forms the New Testament. Further, just as the 1st century Believers would learn about future things, but would never live to see most of them, so it was and will be for all us except for the final generation.

CJB **1 Pet. 1:10-13** <sup>10</sup> *The prophets, who prophesied about this gift of deliverance that was meant for you, pondered and inquired diligently about it.* <sup>11</sup> *They were trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of the Messiah in them was referring in predicting the Messiah's sufferings and the glorious things to follow.* <sup>12</sup> *It was revealed to them that their service when they spoke about these things was not for their own benefit, but for yours. And these same things have now been proclaimed to you by those who communicated the Good News to you through the Ruach HaKodesh sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things!* <sup>13</sup> *Therefore, get your minds ready for work, keep yourselves under control, and fix your hopes fully on the gift you will receive when Yeshua the Messiah is revealed.*

**CJB Hebrews 11:12-13 <sup>12</sup> Therefore this one man, who was virtually dead, fathered descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and as countless as the grains of the sand on the seashore. <sup>13</sup> All these people kept on trusting until they died, without receiving what had been promised. They had only seen it and welcomed it from a distance, while acknowledging that they were aliens and temporary residents on the earth.**

After saying all these things, Yeshua now says to His disciples that He is going to explain this parable to them. Let's re-read His explanation.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW 13:18 - 23**

So, says Yeshua, the seed in the parable is like the Word of God; specifically the seed is the message about the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. The 4 types of soil represent 4 types of hearers; that is 4 different reactions and responses to folks hearing the Word of God about the Kingdom. The first is like the soil of a pathway... a road. The seed never takes root; it just lays there on the hard surface, unable to take root, and therefore allowing Satan to come along, scoop it up, and take it away. Paths and roads in Yeshua's day were salted in order to kill vegetation and keep the path clear for easier traveling. So the seed that falls onto the ears of a hearer whose mind is hard packed and poisoned like a pathway, is DOA (Dead on Arrival). This kind of hearer is not in the least open to hearing God's Word and so should he happen to hear it, it's possible affect is immediately stifled and taken away by Satan.

The next type of hearer is compared to rocky soil. The seed falls onto rocky soil. While there is just enough nutrients and softness of the soil for the seed to send out its roots, alas the soil is more rock than earth. So at first things look good; it looks like God's Word has been accepted and has a home. But quickly the rocks overwhelm the good soil, and the seedling dies. Thus this represents the person who hears God Word of truth and immediately goes bananas! They run to the Christian store, and buy one of everything. They even buy not one but three Bibles. They purchase a fish symbol decal and stick it on their car bumper. They say "God Bless You" to everybody. They get on the phone and dial everyone they know about how they just got saved and what a different person they are now...all this in only a matter of hours... and how wonderful it is and how they need to drop what they're doing and do the same as he or she did. They go to Church every time the doors are opened, and volunteer for everything. Then just as suddenly, by the time the credit card bill arrives, they revert. Turns out their

enthusiastic response was mostly a huge emotional experience; and we all know how emotions work (here now, gone in 60 seconds). So the minute that it turns out that Salvation doesn't include having all your problems immediately solved, the emotion turns from joy to disappointment and the person walks away from what they so strongly professed...for a brief time... they believed.

The third case is that of the hearer that is like soil infested with weeds and thorns. The seed falls on the ground that is actually pretty rich in nutrients, so much so that the weeds thrive, too. The seed sends out roots, it begins to grow at a good rate, but then as the plant gets bigger it starts to come into competition with the weeds. This stunts its growth and so the plant never matures to bear the good fruit it was supposed to. In fact, the plant actually takes on some of the characteristics of the weeds; but the weeds never take on any of the characteristics of the plant. So this is the case of a person who accepts God's Word, and starts to grow in it. Slowly and certainly they begin to understand that their former ways were antithetical to God's ways. But, because this person continues to hang around the weeds... the things of this world that corrupt, and the people of this world that mock and deny God... they turn around and begin to look a lot like those weeds. Likely this transformation is (at first) almost imperceptible; a sort of frog in the kettle experience. People like this only occasionally recognize or admit they've gone off the spiritual rails and are headed for a crack-up. They have just enough knowledge of God and His Word to be dangerous... to themselves. They typically find ways to rationalize their wrong behaviors and beliefs with profound words like: "Well, what is sin for you isn't necessarily sin for me." Or, "I only do what the Holy Spirit says and He hasn't told me to stop doing such and such." In the end, this person produces nothing of value to the Kingdom and is back to square one.

James (Jacob actually), Jesus's biological brother, addressed just such a case.

<sup>CJB</sup> **James 5:19-20** <sup>19</sup> *My brothers, if one of you wanders from the truth, and someone causes him to return,* <sup>20</sup> *you should know that whoever turns a sinner from his wandering path will save him from death and cover many sins.*

The final case, the fourth, is of the hearer compared to a seed that falls on fertile ground. The seed sends out roots, it grows, the soil and the rains nourish it, and it blossoms into a wonderful healthy plant. This is the situation whereby we have a sincere hearer of the Word who, upon hearing and believing, repents and

changes their mind and ways. They understand the critical importance of the message of arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. They embrace the seed and are never the same again. This person multiplies what they have been given (100, 60, or 30 fold). And in fact that is the job of every Believer. We aren't supposed to get saved and then settle in for the big sleep. We are to multiply and be fruitful for the Kingdom. That is, we are to become workers for the Kingdom and become the sowers of the seed for the next fertile field we encounter.

The message of this parable then is only one thing: it is that what happens to the message of Good News entirely depends upon the soil it lands on. It explains why such a wonderful divine message falls on deaf ears, and never thrives, more often than not. The reason is that people, like the 4 kinds of soil, are not all the same. Every hearer will not respond in the same way, or at all, to God's message. It is not the fault of the sower or of the seed as to which kind of soil the message falls upon nor what happens to the seed once it is sown. It is entirely up to the soil... the individual hearer... about what happens next.

The crowd that Yeshua spoke to would have understood the parable because they thoroughly understood the agricultural relationship of soil to seed. That is, it is the condition of the soil that will dictate the amount of produce and the abundance of a harvest. So why did Yeshua take the time to explain it in such detail to His disciples? Because he told them more than only the parable. Remember that this is a disappointed and probably tired Jesus preaching this parable; a one-of-a-kind **Tzadik** who laments that as hard as He's worked to give people miracle after miracle, as well as His profound message of deliverance and a good future, that only a few seem to have responded the way He would have hoped. At the same time, in His divine wisdom He knows the reality of fallen humanity. He knows that His disciples who are tasked with bringing this same message to the masses will also not have broad success. They too will suffer slander and disappointment, maybe even self doubt, when their enthusiasm for God and His Kingdom is not shared by as many as they hoped. Yeshua was using this parable to prepare His disciples and to let them know that the relatively few in number who will accept the message won't be their fault. And at the same time he's letting those who form the crowd, and those Jewish religious authorities who lead the crowd, know that the blame for their ignorance of the Kingdom of Heaven falls squarely upon them if they refuse the message (something that Isaiah's prophecies focused on).

As His followers, today, we need to always keep in mind that we are only the

couriers. It's not our message we carry; it's God's. Further, we can't make the soil, the hearer, that our message falls upon behave or respond in any particular way. Yet, we are to faithfully continue to sow the seed upon every type of soil. And for those of you who are Seekers, and not yet Believers, understand that this parable is primarily a message to you: you are the soil. God will not blame the sower or the seed should you reject the message; He will blame you, and it will be upon your head alone that the consequences will fall.

Yeshua now tells the crowd another parable. Open your Bibles again to Matthew 13.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 13:24 - 30**

Notice how once again the background of this parable is agriculture based and again is about sowing seed. Jesus always considers His audience when He speaks to people. In this case His audience remains as Galileans; country folk.

Yeshua begins by using a standard formula for a parable: The Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to (is like) a man who sowed good seed in his field. Many of His parables are specifically to give His listeners a handle on what the Kingdom of Heaven on earth is like. This is important because the standard, knee-jerk understanding of a kingdom naturally is about something tangible. That is, a visible kingdom, on visible land, led by a visible king. But the Kingdom of Heaven, while having similarities to a typical earthly kingdom, is fundamentally different...at least during the current age. The Kingdom of Heaven is spiritual, yet it lives unseen within its members.

The Parable of the Tares (the weeds) is similar to the previous parable but it addresses a different subject: evil and its prince, Satan. Before we address the parable in detail, we first need to grasp that for now, in a sense, the earth is Satan's Kingdom. Naturally God is the ruler above all, including Satan, and Satan has boundaries and limits set by the Father. This issue is not at all agreed upon within the Church. However taking God at His Word, the matter is rather clear. It is only manmade doctrine that muddies the waters.

Isaiah gives us a comprehensive account of Satan's fall and what his desires are.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Isaiah 14:12-14** <sup>12</sup> *"How did you come to fall from the heavens, morning*

*star, son of the dawn? How did you come to be cut to the ground, conqueror of nations? <sup>13</sup> You thought to yourself, 'I will scale the heavens, I will raise my throne above God's stars. I will sit on the Mount of Assembly far away in the north. <sup>14</sup> I will rise past the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.'*

In the New Testament Yeshua explains something so very important for us to apprehend.

**CJB John 12:31 <sup>31</sup> Now is the time for this world to be judged, now the ruler of this world will be expelled.**

No lesser authority than the Son of God says that Satan has been the ruler of this world (the earth). However, a process has begun to change that; it began when Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven arrived, and it accelerated at the Cross. Just as the Kingdom of Heaven comes about as a long process (and we are currently 2000 years along in the process), so is the expulsion of Satan as the prince (the ruler) of this world well along in its process. The end of our current age is the final moment of transition from the earth being Satan's Kingdom to fully becoming God's Kingdom.

Paul acknowledges the reality of Satan's evil control over this world.

**CJB Ephesians 2:1 You used to be dead because of your sins and acts of disobedience. <sup>2</sup> You walked in the ways of the 'olam hazeh (this present world) and obeyed the Ruler of the Powers of the Air, who is still at work among the disobedient.**

**CJB 2 Corinthians 4:4 <sup>4</sup> They do not come to trust because the god of the 'olam hazeh (this present world) has blinded their minds, in order to prevent them from seeing the light shining from the Good News about the glory of the Messiah, who is the image of God.**

The Apostle John joins with Paul in saying the same thing about Satan.

**CJB 1 John 5:19 <sup>19</sup> We know that we are from God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One.**

The final nail in Satan's coffin happens at the final judgment. His Kingdom comes

crashing down in a grand finale that we call the Apocalypse. The problem is that he is very active right now, and Satan is still recruiting members to his kingdom (quite successfully I might add), and this is front and center in Christ's Parable of the Tares.

So what's the difference between the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares? It is that Yeshua explains in the Sower parable that it is each individual's responsibility as a hearer to choose good over evil. But in the Tares' parable, Satan is the real spoiler. Satan shares in the responsibility for potential followers of Christ to be disenfranchised from the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore just as Satan shall be destroyed in the End, so along with him will be those who choose him over God, even if it is unwittingly.

We'll return to this parable next time.