



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 13:1-23

Topic

When the nation of Israel rejected Jesus, He told the Parable of the Sower to explain to His disciples God's new program for spreading the Gospel

Title

"The Sew Must Go On"

Introduction

Have you experienced that moment when spelling things out-loud to each other no longer keeps your kids or grandkids from understanding what you're saying? It can be awkward.

My folks kept me uninformed by speaking broken-Italian to one another on those occasions when there were secrets to be kept.

Jesus had a language - He had a form of spelling things out - that was meant to reveal truth to His disciples while concealing it from His enemies. The language I'm referring to was **parables**.

When we think of parables, we think in terms of the dictionary definition, which is, "a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson." Illustrations usually help reveal meaning; but that's not so in the case of parables.

Jesus will make it clear that He used parables to speak to His disciples in a way that His enemies could not understand.

Why would He do that? His enemies had rejected Him as their King and they had rejected the kingdom that He would have established had they received Him. He would be returning to Heaven to await a Second Coming to earth when He would be received as King and when He would establish the kingdom.

In-between these two comings of Jesus Christ, something previously unknown to mankind was going to occur. Jesus will call it His "church" in chapter sixteen.

The church, and the church age in between the two comings of Jesus, was a mystery that Jesus needed to reveal to His disciples but that He wanted to conceal from His enemies.

He spelled-it-out, as it were, in parables that only believers could understand. There are seven parables in this chapter and, while I wish we could look at how they all connect, today we will look only at the first and most famous, the Parable of the Sower.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Age In Which You Live Was A Mystery Jesus Concealed From His Enemies Through Parables, and #2 The Age In Which You Live Was A Mystery Jesus Revealed To His Disciples Through Parables.

#1 The Age In Which You Live Was A Mystery Jesus Concealed From His Enemies Through Parables

(v10-15)

In verses one, two, and three you read,

Mat 13:1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.

Mat 13:2 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.

Mat 13:3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables...

Then, in verse ten you read,

Mat 13:10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

Speaking in parables was something brand new, something Jesus had not done previously. It was a whole new way of communicating that the disciples didn't see coming. It was so unusual that their first question wasn't "**What** does the parable mean, but rather, "**Why** do You speak to them in parables."

Mat 13:11 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.

A word about the word "mysteries." In the Bible, a "mystery" is something that was previously *unknown* and *unknowable* that was being revealed. In Colossians 1:26, for example, Paul speaks of, "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."

Something was getting ready to happen that was previously unknown and unknowable.

God's activities on the earth while Jesus is in Heaven awaiting His Second Coming are the mysteries of the kingdom revealed in these seven parables.

His disciples would understand the parables, but His enemies - those who had rejected Him - would not. Jesus would spell it out for the saved.

Let's start with His enemies, in verses ten through fifteen.

Mat 13:10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

Mat 13:11 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.

Mat 13:12 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.

Mat 13:13 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Mat 13:14 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;

Mat 13:15 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.'

Jesus quoted from the sixth chapter of Isaiah. It related a time in Israel's past when the Jews had refused to receive God's Word. Jesus said it was also a prophecy that was being fulfilled in His day as the Jews were rejecting Him.

This is *not* a general teaching about certain people being unable to hear the Gospel and see Jesus. It is a specific prophecy about the people of Jesus' day who **saw** His miracles and **heard** His teachings but made a personal choice to reject Him. They hardened their hearts to the Word, and to the works, of God.

They had rejected the light, so they would be given no more light, but rather would be left in the dark. Even what they had would be taken away - meaning in part that their King would ascend into Heaven.

The disciples were looking forward to the kingdom on earth. They argued over who would be greatest in it. As late as His ascension into Heaven, the disciples were still asking if it was going to be established.

Jesus turned His attention to preparing His disciples for the delay of the literal kingdom on earth. He didn't stop ministering to others, but His focus was on the disciples who would carry-on the work of spreading the Gospel.

One thing to realize is that the time of the parables ended relatively quickly. It only lasted from this point until Jesus was crucified.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't read them or that we don't learn from them. They are a rich vein of spiritual knowledge.

I'm saying that Jesus Christ's disciples are not to keep anything secret. I'm saying that we are in the church age described by these seven parables and ought to be about the business of evangelizing. The Gospel - all of it - is to be preached and explained in the clearest terms possible.

For example on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter preached the first sermon of the church age in which we are still living, did he use parables? Did he try to conceal the truth?

Of course not. He preached Christ, and Him crucified for our sins, and risen from the dead on the third day.

In that huge Pentecost crowd there were certainly Jews who had been enemies of Jesus, who had been spoken to in parables they could not understand. But the time of the parable concealing truth had passed and the Gospel was going out to all of them, to whosoever would believe, with clarity and with the power of God the Holy Spirit.

The rest of chapter thirteen gives us an overview of the church age.

#2 The Age In Which You Live Was A Mystery Jesus Revealed To His Followers Through Parables

(v1-9 & 16-23)

The seven parables in this chapter describe the church age from start to finish. They go beyond the church, through the Great Tribulation, right up to the Second Coming.

This mystery age starts with, and continues by, the preaching of the Gospel, represented by the Parable of the Sower.

The rest of the parables explain other aspects of the age, e.g., the Parable of the Dragnet in verses forty-seven through fifty, which describe the separation of the righteous and the wicked at the very end of the age.

The Parable of the Sower is crucial because it describes the activity that starts the age and that will characterize it right up to its end.

Mat 13:1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.

Mat 13:2 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.

Mat 13:3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow.

Mat 13:4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

Mat 13:5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth.

Mat 13:6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

Mat 13:7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

Mat 13:8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Mat 13:9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Let's get right to Jesus' own comments about the parable. He tells us what is important to notice about it.

Mat 13:16 But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;

As much as His enemies could not decipher the language of parables, the disciples were meant to understand them.

Mat 13:17 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 "prophets" and the "righteous" of the Old Testament all spoke of the time that their Savior would come. They looked forward to it, down the corridors of history. But they could only see it by faith.

As privileged as they were, the first century followers of Jesus were more privileged. They could see Jesus, hear Him, feel Him, fellowship with Him, in ways no previous saint could have truly experienced.

But He would be leaving them, returning to Heaven for a time. With Jesus in Heaven, the kingdom of Heaven is not now a visible, earthly organization existing in a specific place. The kingdom of Heaven is the rule of God in the hearts of believers through the power of His Word and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples would be commissioned to go into the whole world preaching the Gospel. Their mission could not ultimately fail, but they would meet with varying degrees of success, as would others after them, until the coming of Jesus.

Jesus compared their activities to a sower sowing seed.

Mat 13:18 "Therefore hear the parable of the sower:

Mat 13:19 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.

Mat 13:20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

Mat 13:21 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.

Mat 13:22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Mat 13:23 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."

The first sower was Jesus, then His immediate disciples, followed by all the disciples made after them - whosoever believes in Him. You and I are sowers.

The seed is the Word of God. The soil represents the hearts of men.

Just like a seed, the Word of God has life within it. It simply needs to be broadcast in order to accomplish its purpose.

Scholars point out that parables can be a little tricky to navigate. Every detail in a parable doesn't necessarily represent something. We need therefore to be careful to not go beyond the teaching of the parable.

If you want to know where to start figuring out more about this parable, I'd suggest it's with the word "hear." **It's repeated nineteen times in this chapter.** That level of repetition is significant.

We can think in terms of the four soils as four different people who "hear"; or as one person who "hears" the Word at different times in his or her life.

Let me demonstrate how it can be true of one person. We all know people who maybe seemed completely hard to the Gospel, as if the devil snatched it away, but who later came to Christ. No one person, it seems, is limited to one type of heart throughout their lifetime.

For the sake of our discussion let's think about four different people. **The first thing to notice is that all of them are said to "hear the Word" in a way that makes them responsible for what happens next.**

In this I see the grace of God at work upon each and every human heart to make it possible to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved.

God must take the initiative of bringing people to salvation by calling all people everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel (Acts 17:30). He must enable those who hear the Gospel to respond to it positively in faith. Unaided by grace, man cannot choose to please God or to believe the promise of salvation held out in the Gospel. As Jesus said in John 6:44, "**No one** can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws** him."

But thanks be to God, Jesus *also* promised, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all people to myself**" (John 12:32). The Father and the Son draw all people to Jesus, enabling them to come to Jesus in faith.

The Holy Spirit has come to "convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Even though nonbelievers "are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Ephesians 4:18), the Lord opens people's hearts to respond positively to the Gospel message (Acts 16:14) and his kindness leads those with hard hearts toward repentance (Romans 2:4-5).

In His sovereignty, He has even positioned people for the very purpose “that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27 NASB).

God thus frees our will to either believe or to not believe. As I said earlier, we "hear" the Word in a way that makes us responsible for what happens next.

Why do some people respond to the Gospel and get saved while others do not? In the end, the answer to that question cannot be given. It is a mystery in our normal use of the word - something we cannot determine.

Jesus does give us some insight as to why a person upon whom God's grace is working to free their will resists and does not respond by faith. It has to do with things that affect and influence the human heart.

Obviously a lot has been written and said about these various soils, but I think a simple key is to notice that they represent three adversaries, three influences, which we will immediately recognize when we see them together.

1. In the first case, the **devil** snatches away the Word.
2. In the next, the problem is what we would call the **flesh**. The person is unwilling to sacrifice or suffer in the flesh for the sake of Jesus. Physical ease is preferred to spiritual growth.
3. In the third case, the problem is the **world**.

The world, the flesh, and the devil. One is an outer enemy, the other an inner foe, the third a relentless adversary. They are the result of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden.

We always think of these three as our spiritual foes *after* we are saved, and that is true. But they are the enemies of nonbelievers, too, which influence the freed will against receiving Jesus Christ.

For example we have in the Bible the story of the rich young ruler. He wanted to follow Jesus, but when The Lord told Him to sell all he had, the things of the **world** exerted too great an influence upon him and he chose to resist the grace of God. He's an example of God freeing the will but of the world interfering.

Maybe that helps explain why, sometimes at least, it's after a person has lost everything that they respond favorably to the grace of God. The world can no longer exert its influence upon them.

There are anecdotal stories, not biblically verifiable, about the rich young ruler being Mark (who wrote the Gospel of Mark) or even Barnabas (prominent in the Book of Acts). Those are probably not true, but what *could* be true is that at a later time the rich young ruler heard the Gospel again and did receive The Lord.

Then there is the case of the Hebrew Christians written to in the Book of Hebrews. Because of severe persecution, they were stumbling and falling back into Judaism. They are an example of God freeing the will but of the **flesh** interfering.

As for an example of the **devil** snatching away the Word, we could cite the crowds that followed Jesus. When The Lord started talking about a deeper commitment to discipleship, most of the crowd quit following Him because they were shallow.

Jesus was preparing His disciples for the age between His comings. They would preach the Gospel like farmers broadcasting seed. There was life inherent in the seed, but still many hearers would resist it.

Nonetheless a sower ought to not become discouraged. It is the job of the sower to broadcast seed - *not* to create results.

And while there would be many throughout the church age who would resist the Gospel, it would also produce an amazing harvest.

Mat 13:23 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."

I read that farmers in the first century would be ecstatic to get a ten fold return on their seed. This is a promise of incredible blessing.

The Parable of the Sower doesn't teach that only 25% of people will be saved. It commands us to broadcast the Word of God so people everywhere will "hear" it and, by God's grace, be freed to respond to it - in one of these four ways.

If we look at ourselves before we were saved, we can see times we heard the Gospel and let the devil snatch it away. Or times we caved-in to the flesh. Or times when we desired the things of the world more than the things of God.

Since we are saved, we also recall that time when we said "Yes" to God's drawing us to Christ, repented of our sins, and were born-again into the family of God.

As believers, we still battle the world, the flesh, and the devil. But we battle them from a place of victory and with the empowering of God the Holy Spirit living within us.

The Lord is coming back. Before He does, He's going to return to resurrect and rapture His church. Let's be bust sowing when we hear the trumpet sound.