



Lesson 5

Chapter 13: Teaching in Parables

In chapter 13 we see Jesus as the Master teacher, using simple ideas to present the wonderful truth of the Gospel. His stories, or parables, are very well known but we need to think about them to understand them fully. In some cases Jesus himself gave the explanation and this is a great help.

Why did Jesus teach in Parables (13:10-17)?

Jesus taught in parables which are easy to remember but not always easy to understand. They are earthly stories with heavenly or spiritual meanings.

It requires effort to search out the true message of a parable and Jesus knew that not everyone is prepared to do this. Parables distinguish those who humbly seek God's truth from those who have no great interest, as well as from those who oppose the message.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah prophesied that the nation of Israel would not want to hear God's message and that they would reject the teaching of Jesus (Isaiah 6:9, 10). This happened as he wrote; many of the Jews of Jesus' day shut their ears and their eyes to Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' close followers wanted to understand his teaching. They were hungry and thirsty for righteousness. The way people respond to the Gospel is one of the great themes of Matthew 13.

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-8)

Jesus helped his disciples and us to understand the first two parables in this chapter. He provided keys to unlock the parable of the Sower. The seed in this parable is the '*Word of the kingdom*' (verses 18-19). Jesus showed that the four types of ground represent four different groups of people, each showing a different response to God's message.

The seed fell on four types of ground.

- The wayside path – quickly devoured by the birds.
- Rocky ground – not enough earth for roots to take hold.
- Thorny ground – seed germinated and produced a good crop.



Jesus explains the Meaning of the Parable (13:18-23)

1. Those who do not respond are represented by the hard ground of the path. They hear the Gospel but it does not take root, it means nothing to them.
2. People who accept God's truth but later leave it because of problems and difficulties are described as ground that is either rocky or full of weeds.
3. Those who embrace the call of the Gospel and then get distracted by the riches and attractions of this life are like ground that is choked with thorns.
4. The only people pleasing to God are those who:
 - hear the word;
 - understand it;
 - and produce a crop (shown in their actions and way of life).

Jesus wanted people to ask themselves which type of ground they were. We must also ask ourselves this question. Unlike the 'ground' in the parable however, we can improve our own kind of 'ground' by getting rid of 'stones' and 'weeds' in our lives (things like habits and attitudes that could prevent the Gospel bringing us to the 'harvest' in the Kingdom of God).



The Parable of the Weeds (13:24-30; 36-43)

It is possible that Jesus was speaking about darnel, the weed that looks no different to wheat while it is growing. It can only be distinguished from the wheat just before harvest time as the crop ripens but by then it is difficult to separate out. So wheat and darnel are harvested together and separated out afterwards. This is essential as darnel seeds taste bitter and can make people ill. Because they are a different colour from wheat seeds they can be separated by hand after the harvest, the darnel is then destroyed by burning and the wheat is stored for eating. Jesus had already spoken about identifying plants and trees by the type of fruit they produced. *"Thus you will recognize them by their fruits"* (Matt. 7:20).

In this parable, Jesus said that these weeds were deliberately sown by an enemy after the wheat crop had been planted; they wanted to destroy the harvest.

The disciples privately asked Jesus the meaning of this parable and the keys he provided to unlock the meaning are summarised in the table:

ITEM IN PARABLE	MEANING
The Sower of good seed	The Son of Man – Jesus
The field	The world
Good seed	Children of the kingdom
Weeds	Children of the evil one
Enemy that sowed the bad seed	The devil (diabolos 'slanderer', 'false accuser')
Harvest	The end of the world
Reapers (those who gather in the wheat and the weeds)	Angels
Burning of the weeds	Removal of all causes of sin and all law-breakers

What does this mean for us?

The parable teaches us of the Gospel message, the seed or word of God, sown throughout the whole world. Some will accept it and become true disciples of Jesus, represented by the wheat. Others appear to accept the Gospel but gradually are shown to be people who listen to wrong ideas and beliefs about the Bible and accept them. At the return of Jesus, he will send his angels to gather all these people to the Judgement. The true disciples will be welcomed into his kingdom and the false ones will be destroyed. We are told about their reaction to this.

Matthew 13:42 says:

"... and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The weeping shows great sadness. These people have been rejected from the wonderful blessings of God's righteous kingdom. They are probably angry with themselves when they see what they have missed. This passage does not support the idea that the wicked are thrown into a furnace or kept burning forever. It is a picture of the complete destruction of the unrighteous.

THE DEVIL IN THIS PARABLE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At first sight this parable seems to support the idea that there is a supernatural devil. However Matthew 13:28 says:

"He (Jesus) said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'"

The New Testament was written in Greek and the Greek word for 'enemy' in this verse is 'a man that is an enemy'. The enemy was a person who had a bad influence.

So the original language of the New Testament is quite clear that the enemy that Jesus calls the devil is human and this passage cannot be used to support the idea of an immortal evil being that makes people do wrong.





More Parables (13:31-50)

The Mustard Seed (verses 31-32)

This is a small and insignificant seed but grows into a large tree. God's kingdom started in a small way, with one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was despised and rejected. Yet when he returns to this earth, the kingdom will grow to fill the whole earth.

The Treasure Hid in a Field (verse 44)

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure that is hid in a field". When the man finds it, he conceals it and with great joy sets about selling everything he has to buy the field. We must look carefully in the Bible to understand God's plans for the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Jesus promised, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."* (Matt. 7:7).

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (verses 45-46)

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls". When the pearl of great value was found the merchant sold everything he had in order to purchase it. The pearl is God's plan for our salvation and it must be more precious to us than anything else in our lives.

Jesus' teaching through these parables

The Gospel message is available to everyone who will listen and obey the call of Jesus to repent and be baptised. We must search in order to find and understand Bible teaching. God offers us a priceless treasure, but it will not be for everyone because there will be a time of judgement when Jesus Christ returns. Only those who have tried to serve God in faithfulness will be allowed to enjoy His Kingdom.

Chapter 14: Moved with Compassion

The Death of John the Baptist (14:1-12)

The cruelty of Herod the Tetrarch is shown in his wicked treatment of John the Baptist who was murdered to please Herod's dinner guests. John the Baptist had spoken against Herod for taking Herodias as his wife because she was already the wife of his half-brother Philip.

When news reached Jesus of John's death, he went to a place where he could be alone, probably to mourn and to pray. Yet the crowds followed him, travelling on foot around the Sea of Galilee and meeting Jesus when he arrived by boat. Jesus did not send them away, instead he had compassion on them, preaching the gospel, healing those who were ill and feeding the hungry.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand (14:13-21)

This is the only miracle of Jesus written in all four Gospels, and it is an important one, for it shows:

- Jesus' concern for people's physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.
- His great power, he could feed five thousand men and their families from a few loaves and fish.
- How Jesus showed, in giving thanks to God, that all good things come from his Father.

John's Gospel (John 6:9) tells us that the five loaves and two fish were given by a boy. Jesus was able to satisfy the physical needs to all who were hungry. The important lesson for us is that Jesus can satisfy our eternal needs if we are hungry his teaching because he is *"the bread of life"*.

Temptation (14:22, 23)

In John's Gospel we are told that when the crowd saw this amazing miracle they said:

"This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:14)

This was a time of temptation for Jesus, just like the temptation he had experienced in the wilderness before his ministry started. He knew that he was born to be King of the Jews but he had to die first. He realised that this was a time of temptation so he moved away from the people:

"Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself." (John 6:15).

