

## Parables Of Matthew 13 (Part One): Introduction

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*Forerunner*, "Bible Study," September-October 2005

Matthew 13 contains Christ's explanation of His use of parables as a way of teaching. In analyzing these parables, we discover the King's personal view of His Kingdom through the past, present, and future of the history of His church. They seem not to reveal as much about the church's eternal characteristics as about its day-to-day efforts resulting from Christ's work in coming into the world. They act as a prophetic summary of the historical development of God's church. The recurring phrase "kingdom of heaven" denotes Christ's work through His church to make known "the word of the kingdom" (verse 19), that is, to announce the good news of the coming Kingdom of God.

The chapter contains eight parables. Jesus gave the first four to the mixed multitude, while He told the last four to the twelve disciples in private. After the first series of four parables, Matthew writes, "All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them" (verse 34). These four parables describe the outward characteristics of the church, the working of the mystery of sin against the church, and the extent to which the Evil One is allowed to go in his opposition. The remaining four parables illustrate the inner characteristics of His church. After the eighth parable, Matthew makes another concluding statement, ". . . when Jesus had finished these parables, . . . He departed from there" (verse 53).

The parables can also be grouped into related pairs that illustrate the church's different characteristics:

**First Pair:** *The Sower* (verse 3) represents the relationship of the church to the different groups of people with which it comes into contact while doing its work. *The Tares* (verse 24) represents the relationship of the church to the wicked one and his agents.

**Second Pair:** *The Mustard Seed* (verse 31) represents the dynamic growth of the church from small beginnings even while adversaries confront it. *The Leaven* (verse 33) represents the progress of the church against and despite the contagious outspread of sin.

**Third Pair:** *The Treasure* (verse 44) represents the preciousness of Christians to Christ, who can see their hidden value and sacrifices all to possess them. *The Pearl* (verse 45) represents the preciousness of the Church to Christ, who sacrifices everything to acquire it.

**Fourth Pair:** *The Dragnet* (verse 47) teaches that the good and evil who intermingle on earth will be completely separated in the judgment. *The Householder* (verse 52) represents the work of the true minister and teacher who feeds the household of faith from a rich storehouse of essential spiritual treasures.

Taken together, the stories describe the characteristics and dynamism of the church, its formidable obstacles, and its ultimate victory. They show Christ working through His messengers to preach the gospel of the Kingdom between the time of His first and second comings.

The first parable, *The Sower*, and the eighth, *The Householder*, are key, the first introducing and anticipating all of the parables, and the last concluding and reflecting back on the whole, stating the church's purpose and duty under the authority of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus finished the first seven parables, He asked His disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" That they understood made it possible for Jesus to conclude with a final parable that reveals the responsibility of the disciples as "scribes" in the church, "instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven" (verse 52). The apostles, and the church Jesus would build, would bring forth a treasure of knowledge and understanding, "things new and old."

Jesus teaches us by the simplicity and shortness of His parables that directness and brevity are effective teaching tools. His method stands in sharp contrast to the involved and lengthy style of some Bible commentators. Jesus gave clear and precise illustrations to which His audience could relate. Farmers listened to pictures of agricultural life. Wives could grasp His word pictures from home life. Merchants could relate to illustrations from the business world that translated into spiritual principles. Jesus also spoke of common civic duties and social events. Portrayals of nature scenes provided Him with analogies with which to express spiritual truth. Jesus used pictures that fit the occasion in a way that preserved their naturalness.

Only Christ's disciples can really understand the true spiritual principles involved in the parables, "because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (verse 11). They were inspired by His Father in heaven, "[for] all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15), therefore "blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew 13:16).

In Part Two, we will analyze the Parable of the Sower.