

Matthew ch 13 vs 1-

Now even though we have here a ch break, don't think that the curtain has come down and that we're at a new act. As we'll see this is still the same day that we've divided into several bible studies. And we closed our last gathering with the observation of the fact that Jesus gave no special place to Mary as one who is to be respected over any other disciple of Jesus Christ. You recall Jesus was instructing the multitudes from inside a house and they were all pressing in around the house and His mother Mary and His brothers it says stood outside and wanted to speak to Him. And so someone said to Him, hey your Mom and your bros are outside and they want to speak to you, and Jesus said who are My mother, and My bros? and It says that He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, here are My mother and My bros, for whoever does the will of God are My mother and My bros and My sisters.

In other words Mary took no special seat in the life of Jesus over any other individual who does the will of God. and Jesus was also teaching the people that family ties are not the all important thing, but that doing the will of God is. As a matter of fact, many times family ties are broken because of Christ as you come into the light and your family members still love the darkness and so this division takes place. And you find yourself in many cases actually closer to your brothers and sisters in Christ, than your actual blood relatives that don't know Jesus, because the Spirit of God has a way of knitting the hearts of believers together. I've met believers, literally from other parts of the globe and sensed an immediate bond to that person as though I've known them my whole life and yet we only met 5 minutes ago and in some cases we don't even speak the same language. But you have Jesus in common and the Spirit just weaves your hearts together, because though you may not have the same language physically, you both Love Jesus and the language of the Love of God (Agape) is universal among believers. Many of you have no doubt experienced the same thing.

But we find in ch 13, that though it's already been a long day for Jesus, it's not over yet. Now, ch 13 does mark a turning point in this gospel in a couple of different ways, #1 though Jesus has taught in various places, primarily He has taught from the synagogues. And we'll see that continually decrease as the opposition from the religious leaders increase. #2 Though Jesus has used kind of a lesser form of parabolic teaching in and through some of His various illustrations up until this point; such as the speck in your bro's eye and the log in yours, the wise and foolish builder, we're to be salt and light, new vs old wine skins etc..

Here we see for the 1st time the fully developed use of the parable, and though Jesus wasn't the inventor of this particular teaching method, He definitely was the One to master it and take it heights never before seen or heard and unparallel since. We don't really find any other NT figure teaching or writing in the form of parables; there was just no holding a candle to Jesus. Ch 13 also marks out what is considered another major discourse in the gospel of Matt, and even as we found that the sermon on the Mt was directed primarily to the disciples, this teaching of Jesus He directed to the multitudes. And now that Jesus has been rejected by the nation of Israel as represented by the religious leaders, the natural question that would arise would be, OK so what's going to happen with the kingdom? And Jesus shares through the teaching of these parables what will happen in regards to the kingdom during this interim period of time during which He is not physically present. From the time that Jesus ascends, to the time He returns to rule and reign with a rod of iron. And interestingly enough Jesus gives us in this ch 7 parables describing the kingdom.

And though I don't claim to have perfect understanding of every detail of each parable and I don't know that as I grow in the Lord my understanding of the parables might grow as well. But there are some things that we can grasp through a fancy theological phrase known as expositional constancy, which simply put means that if one particular thing stands to illustrate something in this case, then the next time Jesus uses that word, it illustrates the same thing. If Jesus tells us that the field represents the world in this parable, then when in another parable Jesus speaks of a field, we can know that He's speaking of the world, there's that element of constancy there that if you ignore, then you can get into a lot of trouble in your interpretation of scripture because you're left to define it how ever you feel the need. You see it like this and I see it like that, and that's how heresy is born, there needs to be that consistency there if we want to stay balanced in our understanding; that's part of rightly dividing the word of truth. That's no doubt partly why Jesus teaches on the parable of the sower 1st, because He gives to us the meaning of this particular parable and so we can use it as a key to sort of unlock the mystery of the others. Using the method of expositional constancy. So as you go through the parables bear that in mind and just be sure that you're not just pulling your interpretations out of thin air with nothing other than your own opinion to back it up.

Vs1-2

So again we see that it was on the same day that all this other stuff has been happening that Jesus went out of the house, (it was no doubt stuffy in there with all the people pressing in on Him) and He went down by the sea, probably to cool off and provide more space and all the multitudes followed Him. It says here that great multitudes gathered together there where He was and no doubt like in several other cases the crowd got to be so intense, that had He stayed there on the shore He would've been crushed and so He jumps in a boat (probably pushes out just a little ways so that He's just off the shore line) and He sets down.

Now when He sat down, the people knew they were in for a lesson because that was the traditional posture of the teacher in that day, just as we seen when He taught the sermon on the MT He sat down and His disciples came to Him, because they knew He had something to teach them. Today I stand, you set, then I would've sat and you all would be standing. And so Matt notes for us that Jesus was sitting, and the multitudes were standing and by that we know Jesus is getting ready to teach. And I'm sure that there's no coincidence in the fact that Jesus is in the boat speaking to the multitudes. Because not only did it keep Him from being crushed; acoustically speaking, the water would act as a natural amplification system to carry His voice so that He wasn't screaming or anything else. But the water would carry His voice so that everyone could hear what He was about to say.

Vs3

So here we read of the fact that Jesus taught the multitudes in parables, what exactly is a parable? The word parable comes from the Greek word "paraballo" (Para), which means along side and (ballo) which we get our word ball from and it means to throw. So the literal definition of the word parable is "to throw along side", or "to cast alongside." In other words the parabolic method of teaching takes a story, and places it alongside a truth, or a principle. So that if there were an abstract idea that I was trying to get you to grasp and you were having a hard time with it, I would liken it to something very practical that you could understand, and so that you would be enlightened to what I was saying. And the point of these parables is to throw a physical or a practical earthly picture alongside a spiritual truth or principle so that those who desire to be enlightened to the things of God might be. But those who have no true interest in the things of God will only hear a neat story and kind of go, gee that was neat whatever. Because there's no way I can teach you what you don't understand with out starting from something you do understand. And so a parable has the propensity to open a mans mind and his eyes by beginning from right where he is, and taking him on to where he ought to be.

A parable compels interest by teaching a potentially difficult truth in the form of a story. Because everybody likes stories, and a parable puts forth a truth in the form of a story. The classic definition of the word parable is "an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning" Jesus takes practical examples and through them teaches spiritual truths. But by the same token a parable is meant to challenge the hearer, it won't do your thinking for you. You have to want to discover the truth in it, it's not really like a riddle, but more like a mystery (and that's not really a good definition either but with my limited vocabulary that's about the best I can do.) But the point is to compel you to think and search out the truth that it contains. And a parable will do just that, it will reveal truth to those who desire to search it out, but to those that have no interest in the truth or are too lazy to seek it out, or blinded by prejudice; then the truth that's contained in a parable will be concealed to you.

So in one way these parables are a display of God's grace to those who have rejected Jesus, because He's speaking to them the truth's of the kingdom but it's put in such a way that all they're hearing is a story so that they aren't really accountable for a truth that they won't or can't perceive. But at the same time those who are sincere about following Jesus can come into that understanding and be enlightened to the things of the kingdom. So in a sense the parables of Jesus were God's mercy to the hardened, but opportunity for those of us who love Him to grasp spiritual truths and all we can do is pray for a balanced understanding of the concepts that Jesus is trying to teach us in and through these parables.

Vs4

This is category #1, seed that falls by the wayside. The way side was a path that was used by travelers who were traveling or walking through that particular field. For the most part their fields were sort of long and narrow, and they didn't have fences partitioning off their plot of land from someone else's, or dividing to separate plots of ground. So the division was made by this path, and people would travel through those paths, and so consequently they would become rock hard and totally impenetrable by the seed. Remember a few weeks ago when we read of Jesus and His disciples going through the wheat fields, and His disciples were plucking the heads and eating them, they were no doubt using these established paths that people would walk through going by the way side of the field. And since these pathways became like cement, the seed and the seed couldn't sink in; they just stayed on top of the soil and became tasty morsels for the birds of the air that made no delays in snatching them up.

Vs 5

Now you maybe thinking (when it says "stony places") of an area of the field or some place that has rocks scattered all over it, but that's not really what this is in regards to. This is speaking of an area that looks the same on the surface as the rest of the ground. But under the initial skin layer of earth (a couple inches of dirt or whatever) is a layer of bedrock that the seed obviously can't penetrate. And you think well he should've discovered that when he was plowing, and the way we do it today we would, but back then still sometimes today over there they may just barely scratch the surface of their field before sowing the seed, or they may not do anything at all, or they might sow the seed 1st and then till the earth after the seed is sown thereby working the seed into the earth at the same time that they are plowing or tilling. Any of those 3 options are a very real possibility and so it's very possible to sow your seed right over an area of ground that looks just as promising as any place else only to see your crop that's in that area came to ruin because there's no depth of earth for it to really take root.

Vs6

So you see since the soil was warm it would encourage rapid growth, but there's no way it could maintain because there was just not enough depth of earth for the roots to be properly nourished, and so the sun beating down on it would (again) quickly scorch the plant or whatever it was that you were planting.

Vs 7

I think that anyone who's ever even attempted to plant a garden can identify with this. You can till the earth and it looks like good clean ground, but somewhere lurking beneath the surface lays the root system of thorns, thistles and weeds. and They always seem to grow faster and stronger than your crop. But we notice in this case that there was nothing-wrong with either the soil, or the plants, they were able to permeate the soil, germinate properly, establish a good root system; and come up strong. The problem in this case is the things that were growing up alongside of it robbing its nutrition and eventually choking the life right out of it. Stealing the life of the plant, the things that were no good taking up all the nutrients intended for the plant and killing the crop.

Vs8

So finally we see that there is good ground to be sown and when the seed hits that ground the harvest is phenomenal, even a crop that produces 30 fold is a good one, but here we see that some produced 60 and some even 100 fold. And it reads in the Greek in such a way that it's clear that the seed sown once; kept on bearing or yielding fruit. It's not a 1-time thing but a continual bearing.

Vs9

So what does Jesus do here, He immediately thrusts the lesson to the responsibility of the hearer, God's initiative and then human responsibility. He takes an illustration that is very familiar to them, He sits down and it could very well be that within eye shot of the area that He was at there was a man out planting his crops. Even if not they could all easily follow His story because odds are most of them had some sort of field themselves and if they didn't they were all around and so they were familiar with the process of sowing a field. and So Jesus says here the sower went out and sowed his crops, some seed fell on the way side and became lunch for the birds, some fell on stony ground and didn't last, some was choked out by the thorns, and some yielded a great harvest. So they're all standing there probably nodding their heads going OK so tell us something we don't know, what's your point?

And then Jesus says he who has ears to hear, let him hear. and The people go wait a minute there's something more to this than what meets the eye. And Jesus isn't going to tell them what it means, that's the point of a parable, to compel you to think about it so that you might gain a greater insight into whatever it is that your teacher is trying to illustrate to you. And so knowing that there's something more, and not really getting it themselves the disciples come to Jesus here in vs 10 and say.

Vs 10

And notice the separation that's made here, why do you speak to *them* in parables; not the disciples, so there is a distinction made here between those who have fully committed to Jesus and are His disciples, and those who are either looking to find fault with Jesus or haven't really committed to Him but are just sort of checking things out.

Vs11

Now the 1st thing I want to do here is tackle this word "*mysterios*" because when we think of the word mystery we think of some mystery novel or movie that keeps us on the edge. That's supposed to keep us guessing until the very end and then we find out that we've been wrong all along. And now you see why my choice of words earlier in calling it a mystery was kind of inaccurate as far as the way we would consider a mystery goes. This is how the vines Greek dictionary defines the word mystery. "*In the NT it denotes, not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit. In the ordinary sense a "mystery" implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed.*"(From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

One thing I want to avoid in this text is the doctrine of freewill vs election, because the bible teaches that you've been chosen from the foundations of the earth. But by the same token the bible is very clear that whosoever will may come and Jesus said whoever comes to Me, I will by no means cast out.

So we find in these statements a paradox, 2 equal truths that the bible teaches that kind of run alongside one another and where they meet only God knows. Because God's ways are above our ways and beyond our finding out, so I'm not going to get into this debate concerning freewill vs election right now, for I determine to know nothing among you except for Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God, and simply put I don't think that, that's where Jesus is going with this necessarily any way. It seems more to me that Jesus is simply saying that it has been given to those who are His disciples to know spiritual truths. But to those who aren't Jesus' disciples they won't be granted that privilege. But that's not to ostracize anyone, do you want to understand the things of God? Then become a disciple of Jesus Christ you see how that works?

In other words the spiritual truths of Christianity can only be understood from the inside; you say you won't believe till you see, I say you won't see until you believe. Paul put it like this in 1 Cor 2:14 *"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* That's the basic thrust of what Jesus is saying here, those who have received the illumination of the truth's contained in what Jesus is saying are those who have had the Spirit give it to them, who does the Spirit give it to? His disciples, a similar statement would be 1 Cor 1:18 *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

How do you perceive the message of the cross? Does it seem kind of out there, almost to far out there to be believable, maybe even a bit juvenile or foolish? Then let your own perception bare witness against you, you're perishing. If that's your basic outlook, than you don't know Jesus and you aren't saved. But if you know Jesus then it's the power of God and the most precious thing in your life, it gives you hope, you know that by the cross and your simple faith in what Jesus has done, salvation has been granted to you. But to them it has not been given, not because God's not willing, but because they're not willing to come to God on His terms. It's only after a direct personal encounter with Jesus Christ that an individual will understand these precious truth's that you and I hold so dear to our hearts, but until then it's just foolishness.

Vs12

Again something that I want to quickly diffuse, this vs is not talking at all about money, there isn't even a slight hint in this context that even sort of suggests anything financial. Yet I hear from time to time people use this vs when it comes to financial matters. Now we do read in scripture things like Prov 11:24,25 *"There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself."* But as you can see that's speaking just the opposite of this vs, this vs is saying if you get it; if you want to retain it, you'll be given more. Anytime you read of financial gain in God's economy it comes through giving, the more you give (not to yourself) but to the things of God, to the poor, to those who lack; then God will bless you that you might continue to bless others to His glory. But to with hold more than what is right, the bible teaches will lead to poverty.

Oh you might still have money but you'll find yourself lacking spiritually because you're not being obedient to Gods word. Vs 12 is in regards to Spiritual truths; to those who ask from a sincere heart turned towards God with Jesus as their Lord, it will be given. To those who seek diligently, they will find, and to those who knock it will be opened, but to those who have no real interest in the things of God or consider these things foolish, it will remain concealed.

Jesus isn't trying to conceal the truth, as one might assume at 1st glance of this text, that's not why He came, He came to reveal the truth. But if you reject the truth, the bible says you'll be given over to a lie. The religious leaders have rejected Jesus Christ they aren't interested in learning from Him; all they're interested in is somehow entrapping Him so that they might have Him crucified. So Jesus speaks in parables to minister to those who desire the truth, but to those who aren't interested it just flies right by.

Vs13

How could one, who had rejected Christ and set themselves in opposition to God, understand the teachings that came from God through Christ?

Vs14

So Jesus tells us that the prophecy found in Isaiah ch 6vs9, 10 had its total fulfillment in what was happening here.

Vs15-16

In other words their physical ears and eyes are hearing and seeing, but their spiritual eyes and ears don't. They can hear what He's saying but they don't spiritually comprehend it, they see what's going on, but they're spiritually blinded to the truth. And notice that in these last couple of lines here Jesus mentions by the words of the Lord through Isaiah, the eyes ears and heart, all of which spiritually speaking have become insensate, which we spoke about last week. Because if they would repent and turn to the Lord He would heal them, but they've chosen to reject Jesus Christ and in doing so they've become hardened to the truth. And in that lies a warning, don't reject Jesus Christ lest you should become blinded, deafened to the voice of God and hardened in your heart to the things of God. But rather turn to Him, repent of your sin, and allow Him to heal your heart.

Vs16-17

Peter possibly reflecting back on this lesson wrote in his epistle, *“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.”*

The prophets saw the Christ in types and in shadow's but here they were setting right there with Him, listening to His voice, seeing His face, learning directly from Him. As John said "Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life" Jesus reminds them of their privilege; now Jesus unveils to them the mystery of the parable of the sower, which we will have to wait for until next week.