

Sermons on Matthew

Why Parables? #2

Matthew 13:1-17

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
2/12/2006*

Why Parables? #2

Matthew 13:1-17

On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea.⁻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.

⁻³⁻ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying:

“ Behold, a sower went out to sow.⁻⁴⁻ And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.⁻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.⁻⁶⁻ But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.⁻⁷⁻ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.⁻⁸⁻ But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.⁻⁹⁻ He who has ears to hear, let him hear! ”

⁻¹⁰⁻ And the disciples came and said to Him, “ Why do You speak to them in parables? ”

⁻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.⁻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.⁻¹³⁻ Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.⁻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; ¹⁵for 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.’

⁻¹⁶⁻ But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear;
⁻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. (Matthew 13:1-17)

We've discussed the personal nature of why Jesus taught in parables. In short, people understand and embrace the message of the kingdom of God because God grants this. There is not a person on earth who says 'yes' to the gospel apart from the grace of God. And it is not part grace and part human effort. From spiritual death to life in glory everlasting, all the power comes from one source—the cross of Christ.

Let us now look at the contextual and historical implications of this event. By this event, I am speaking of that fork in the road of history where BC becomes AD; where Old Testament is accompanied by New Testament; and Old Covenant transitions into New Covenant.

I. Kingdom Transition

If one were to sit down and make an effort at a single uninterrupted reading of Matthew they would see what a huge role this transition plays in this gospel. Last week we observed the numerous references to the kingdom of God. One of the most powerful and (at least to the original audience) shocking verses in this entire gospel will be found in chapter 21. Speaking to the Chief Priests and elders of Israel, Jesus prophesied:

_Therefore I say to you, _the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. (Matthew 21:43)

Until the time of Christ the kingdom of God manifested itself in this world through the nation of Israel. Israel had the responsibility of the administration of **"the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2)**. And it was through Israel that Jesus, the **"root of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1, 10)**, the **"Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5)** would be born.

But at the birth of Christ, the kingdom of God would no longer be restricted to one nation. Like a firework that streaks singularly and silently into the sky then explodes filling the night with its beauty and illumination, the singularity of the kingdom as it was represented by Israel (the Old Covenant Church) would explode into every nation, kindred, and tongue (Revelation 5:9) through the New Covenant church.

This should be no surprise to anyone attentively reading the Old Testament. The promise to Abraham was that through his seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3). This brings us back to our question—why did Jesus teach in parables?

Polarizing Parables

Jesus' teaching in parables would be polarizing. Those under His instruction would not find fence-sitting to be an option. People would either take rank with Jesus or take rank against Him. Those who followed Jesus would find increased grace and light in their lives leading to eternal life (Matthew 7:14; 2 Corinthians 2:16). Those who rejected Jesus would find increased darkness leading to death and judgment (Romans 6:16; 2 Corinthians 2:16; James 1:14, 15). Jesus teaches this in the following verse.

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. (Matthew 13:12)

Principle of "More, More—Less, Less"

Here we have the principle of "More, More—Less, Less." This principle should not surprise us. There is no valuable possession, association or attribute we have that will not crumble if neglected or perverted. Health, intellect, talent, virtue, relationships all apply. If we neglect or pervert our diet, study, practice, ethics, etc. they will all suffer.

Jesus faced an audience who had so perverted the true religion that they didn't recognize the Messiah who stood in their very presence. What little knowledge they had, which amounted to nothing of true value, would now vaporize. It shouldn't be any wonder to us that any moderately well-catechized Christian child can give a more accurate account of the Christian faith than most upper university professors.

Jesus reveals a great promise and a great warning. As members of the church, we have Christ before us in word and sacrament. To embrace Him means to know Him more and more fully until He brings us safely home. To reject Him means that true faith will someday become such a muddled affair in our minds and hearts that it could become virtually indiscernible to us.

Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ⁻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; ¹⁵for 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.'
(Matthew 13:13-15)

Fulfilled judgment prophecy (Isaiah 6)

Jesus now brings our attention to one of the major themes of Matthew, if not the entire New Testament: the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant, which would be marked by the judgment of Israel. This was a fulfillment of prophecy.

But unlike the normal language used, “might be fulfilled,” it is the present indicative which could be translated “is being fulfilled.” It was in the process of happening; the kingdom of God would be taken away from Israel and given to a nation bearing the fruits thereof (Matthew 21:43). We would see this as the church.

II. The Implications of Transition

So very numerous are the implications of this that I cannot address them individually. But I will attempt to briefly set the framework before you that you might begin to perceive the monumental nature of this transition, and the devastating consequences of failing to recognize it.

The Promises

The popular teaching today (known as dispensationalism) is that the Israelites are still God’s chosen people and that the promises made to Israel (which is the vast majority of the Old Testament) will be fulfilled to those who are ethnic Jews.

But if what Jesus is teaching here is true, it would appear that the hardness of heart of Israel brought about a transition. The kingdom would be taken from Israel and given to the church (which, by the way, included all the faithful Jews of Jesus’ day). So we certainly cannot view this as anti-Jew. Jesus was not anti-Jew; He was anti-sin and He was anti-any brand of religion which taught that men could stand before God apart from appealing to His own shed blood.

Sons of Abraham

God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God. He will not fail to keep His promise to those who are true sons of Abraham. But the Apostle Paul helps us understand who the true sons of Abraham—true Jews, if you will—are.

Therefore know that *only* __those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. ⁻⁸⁻ And __the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, __*In you all the nations shall be blessed.*__ ⁻⁹⁻ So then those

who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. (Galatians 3:7-9)

The More Profound and Perennial Promises

Again, the implications of this run deep. The glory of this is the good news that the wonderful promises in the Old Covenant were, in one way or another, merely a shadow of the promises to the church. The context, for example, of this well-known promise is the Babylonian captivity. But in a much more profound sense, the promise is to Christ's church.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. ⁻¹²⁻ Then you will __call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will __listen to you. (Jeremiah 29:11-12)

The context for the following much-quoted passage was Solomon's dedication of the temple.

...if My people who are __called by My name will __humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, __then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

But in a much more challenging and perennial sense, this challenge lies before Christ's church. And the author of Hebrews reveals that, at some level, the Old Testament faithful understood this. It is recorded that the Old Covenant saints...

...all died in faith, __not having received the _promises, but __having seen them afar off _were assured of them, embraced *them* and __confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ⁻¹⁴⁻ For those who say such things __declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ⁻¹⁵⁻ And truly if they had called to mind __that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ⁻¹⁶⁻ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed __to be called their God, for He has __prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13b-16)

But, of course, they did receive the promises. Joshua records the promises kept by God.

–So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and –they possessed it and lived in it. ⁴⁴– And the Lord –gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and –no one of all their enemies stood before them; –the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵–Not –one of the good promises which the Lord had –made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass. (Joshua 21:43-45 NASB)

But they realized, as should we, that promises made to Israel in the Old Covenant merely foreshadowed the true and ultimate promise of God to bless His people, to bless the world through Jesus. You might immediately see how this opens the Scriptures like never before. It's like accidentally coming upon a box of love-letters, only to realize after reading them all that they were actually written to you.

Ripe for Judgment

Although the end of the Old Covenant and beginning of the New Covenant (along with the judgment of Israel) is a unique historical event, it is worth noting the general spiritual state of a people who are ripe for judgment.

They hear the truth but they do not understand it. They see the truth but they do not perceive it. Their hearts are thick and dull to the things of God, and they won't open their eyes or ears, nor will they understand with their hearts and repent and be forgiven.

Belief in God and His grace and forgiveness is as foreign and fake to them as Pinocchio or Paul Bunyan. The truth of the Scriptures is to them a fantasy and their fantasies become their reality. It is a sad state of affairs. The preaching and receiving of the gospel is man's only hope.

But in the midst of these words of judgment, Jesus speaks of blessings.

But *–blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; 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*. (Matthew 13:16, 17)*

III. Blessed Eyes and Ears

Let us not think that we bless our own eyes with sight or our own ears with the ability to hear. The blessing comes from above. And the blessing pronounced on the disciples is a blessing which extends throughout history.

The great saints of the old covenant longed to see what we have seen and to behold the full expression of God's grace in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of His Son.

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. (1 Peter 1:12).

We are truly a blessed people. May God ever be praised for rescuing us from the due penalty of our sins. May God ever be praised for graciously opening our blind eyes to the truth of redemption found in Christ.

Questions for Study

1. Discuss and describe the kingdom of God (Page 3)?
2. What are the distinctions between the kingdom of God in the Old Covenant and the New (pages 3, 4)?
3. Why did Jesus teach in parables (pages 3, 4)?
4. What are the implications of the more, more-less, less principle (page 4)?
5. What was fulfilled according to verse 14 (pages 4, 5)?

6. Discussion the implications of the transition of the kingdom of God (pages 5, 6).
7. Who are the true sons of Abraham (pages 5, 6)?
8. How should we view the promise made to Israel in the Old Covenant (pages 6, 7)?
9. What are the characteristics of a people who are ripe for judgment (page 7)?
10. What did the old testaments saints long to see (page 8)?