



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V21 N38 September 22, 2019

BRIDGES

“Introduction: Presenting Jesus”

Matthew 13:1-23

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Evangelism

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8



How do people respond to hearing the gospel?

The opening words of Matthew 13 connect the parables of the kingdom to Jesus' preceding encounter with the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who accused him of being aligned with Satan. People were astonished to see Jesus heal a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute and speculated that Jesus could be the Son of David (12:23), that is, Israel's long-awaited Messiah. But the Pharisees quickly squelched that speculation by offering an explanation of their own: “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons,” they said (v. 23). This marked a turning point in Jesus' ministry. The handwriting was on the wall so to speak. While some in Israel would accept Jesus as the Christ, the majority would follow their leaders and reject him. One commentator explains: “The parables of chapter 13 constitute Jesus' response to the rejection he has experienced from ‘this generation’ in the preceding two chapters. They provide an explanation for the unresponsiveness of his contemporaries, who are here represented by the crowds . . . they reiterate in stronger terms the contrast enunciated in the final passage of each of the two prior chapters (11:25-30; 12:46-50), where those who accept Jesus' yoke and become his true family are contrasted with the many who reject him” (Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation, 147).

According to Matthew 13, the preaching of the good news about Jesus doesn't stop with his crucifixion but continues beyond his resurrection (Ac 2:33-36). Thanks to Luke's second volume, the book of Acts – which traces what Jesus *continued* to do and teach (Ac 1:1-3) through his Spirit-empowered disciples after the ascension (v. 8; cf., 2:33) – readers of the New Testament can track the advance of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and from Samaria to

the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). Since that apostolic mission doesn't end “until the Son of Man comes” (Mt 10:23), it continues today.

The parable of the soils in Matthew 13:1-23 is prophetic in that it describes how people will respond to the evangelistic efforts of Christ followers from the time of Jesus until he returns. It informs our expectations by describing how people will receive our witness. According to the parable, the *sowing of the seed*, which refers to the preaching of the word of God in obedience to Christ's command (Mt. 28:19-20; Ac 1:8), will produce a *crop*, which refers to various quantities of good works, in different kinds of hearers represented by the four different soils. The point of the parable is clear enough. Not all who hear the word receive it, and only some who do eventually produce an *abundant* crop of good works – the expression of a growing understanding of God's will and obedience to it.

The parable suggests that while our responsibility as disciples is to “sow the seed,” namely, share the gospel, our responsibility cannot end there. “Drive-by” evangelism isn't the answer. As anyone with a green thumb knows, some plants flourish with little or no attention after they're planted, but others do not. Some need the care of the gardener to survive. Put in the terms of the parable, some plants need a gardener to shield them from the hot sun and pull up the thorns that threaten to choke them. Likewise, new believers need someone to disciple them, that is, to teach them everything Jesus commanded – to invite them in Paul's words to “follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1Co 11:1). Should the one who shared the gospel in the first place not be that one?



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Matthew 13:1-23

1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear."

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

11 He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 22 The seed

falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. 23 But the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Bracket "that same day" in v. 1.
- Circle "parables" in v. 3.
- Highlight "path," "rocky places," "among thorns," and "good soil" in vv. 3-8.
- Circle "scorched" and "withered" in v. 6.
- Bracket v. 9.
- Circle "secrets" in v. 11.
- Put a "?" in the margin next to v. 12.
- Box "otherwise" indicating *contrast* in v. 15.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 16.
- Underline "kingdom of heaven" in v. 11 and "kingdom" in v. 19.
- Bracket "message about the kingdom" in v. 19.
- Number the occurrences of "word" in vv. 20-23.
- Double underline "falls away" in v. 21.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Verse one opens, "That same day." What day was that?
2. To whom did Jesus tell the parable of the soils?
3. List the four types of soil on which the farmer's seed fell.
4. Verse 12 doesn't sound fair. Shouldn't everyone know the secrets of the kingdom? Explain.
5. Put why Jesus teaches in parables in your own words.
6. Jesus says the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in his hearers. How so?
7. Explain why the second hearer "falls away."
8. Explain why the third hearer is unfruitful.
9. The hearer represented by the "good soil" produces a "crop." To what does "crop" refer?
10. **Discussion:** The various soils represent various responses to the hearing of the word of God described in terms of fruitfulness, not salvation. But readers can't help but speculate as to whether the second hearer and third hearer are saved. Talk about what you think.

Commentary On The Text

Matthew 13:1-23 is easily divided into three parts. In the first part Jesus tells the parable of the soils (vv.1-9). In the second part, he explains to his disciples why he speaks to the people in parables (vv. 10-17). And in the third part, he interprets the parable he has just given (vv. 18-23).

“The parable of the soils is the story about much seed that gets sown, but only a small portion of which bears fruit. The imagery draws on standard Palestinian farming practices. Sowing took place from late October to early December. The sower carried a bag of grain, usually slung over his shoulder. He tossed the seed in rows. It is debated whether the seed was sown and then the land was plowed or vice versa, but it makes no difference to the parable” (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 228-29).

As the story goes, a farmer sows seed that falls on four different soils yielding four different results: a path, rocky places, among thorns, and good soil. Paths ran through the fields as well as around them in those days. Seed that fell on or close to such paths would remain on the top of the ground and be eaten by birds. Rocky places were places where the bedrock came close to the surface rather than places littered with rocks. Seed that fell on such soil would germinate quickly because the soil was warm, but because it was shallow, the plants had no root. “When the sun came up” refers not to the next day but “to hot days that came early in the plants’ life. When this happened the little plants were scorched and withered away” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 337). Among thorns refers to mature bushes with their own seed and root systems. Seed that fell among thorns found intense competition for the nourishment and sunlight needed to grow. Such established bushes choked the new plants and prevented them from producing fruit. Finally, some seeds fell on good soil. Good seeds that fell on good ground produced a good crop in varying magnitude from a hundred down to thirty times what was sown.

Before Jesus has a chance to interpret the parable, his disciples asked him, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” Jesus’ answer is direct, although a bit obscure. In verses 11-13, he tells them that “knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you.” His words to them remind one of his words to Peter after Peter declared later, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Jesus said to Peter then, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven” (v. 17). The disciples had believed what

God revealed to them through Jesus and so God revealed more to them. Teaching in parables enabled Jesus to enlighten his disciples and confuse his skeptics at the same time. What’s more, the calloused response of his opponents fulfilled one of Isaiah’s prophecies. Because of their hardheartedness, Jesus’ contemporaries, like Isaiah’s, refused to hear with their ears, see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts. Consequently, they were doomed.

In his interpretation of the parable, Jesus makes it clear that the four soils represent four different responses to the word, that is, the message of the kingdom. In the first instance, “the careless hearer” (Morris, 345) hears what is said but because he doesn’t understand it, he dismisses it, and so moving quickly, the “evil one comes and snatches away what was sown.” And that’s that. In the second instance, the hearer receives the word with joy but sometime later when trouble or persecution comes, falls away. In the third instance, the hearer receives the word, but the worries of this life get the best of him. Such concerns are something with which everyone can identify. And if the worries of life weren’t enough, there’s deceitful wealth. “The rich may so enjoy having riches that they find themselves caught up in the pursuit of more wealth and end on a treadmill, rich, but never rich enough” (Morris, 347). Only in the last instance is the goal of disciples attained. These hearers receive the word and presumably endure the hardships of following Christ and refuse to be distracted by cares of this world and the allure of wealth. As a result, they produce a healthy crop of good works.

While the parable is about responses to the word in terms of fruitfulness rather than salvation, the spiritual condition of the four types of hearers is often debated. The condition of the second and third hearers is questioned. Some think these responses do not result in salvation. One writer concludes: “The first three kinds of soils are all inadequate. None of them stands for people who were ever true believers, despite certain outward appearances. For farmers, only those plants that bear good fruit count for anything” (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 214). Others see things differently. One writes: “The thing which distinguishes the second, third, and fourth soils is not whether they receive/believe the word – they all do – but whether they produce fruit or not . . . The Lord did not give us this parable to cause us to question our salvation. Rather, He gave it to motivate us to strive to produce much fruit” (Robert N. Wilkin, “The Parable of the Four Soils: Do the Middle Two Soils Represent Believers or Unbelievers? (Matthew 13:20-21),” *The Grace Evangelical Society News* 3:8 [August-September 1988]: 2). In support of the latter view is the observation that the seed germinates to produce living plants in all but the first instance.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *that same day* “The introductory words, ‘on that day,’ serve as a transition from the preceding passage but have the effect of connecting what follows, especially the early part of chap. 13, with the preceding encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees. That is, the parables have something important to say about the nature of the kingdom and its rejection as well as acceptance” (Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33a, *Matthew 1-13*, 367).

v. 1 *parables* “The Greek word *parabole* is a noun, and *paraballo* is the verb, meaning ‘to throw beside.’ The noun means, ‘a placing of one thing by the side of another, juxtaposition, as of ships in battle.’ Metaphorically it means ‘a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude’ . . . essentially a parable involves a comparison. Most parables are extended similes or metaphors” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Matthew,” 2019 ed., 326-27, plano-biblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/matthew.pdf). “For those whose hearts are already hardened, parables conceal, even as they reveal new truths for those who are more receptive (vv. 12-13)” (Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, 212).

v. 6 *scorched, withered* When it comes to the plants that sprout on “rocky places” and “among thorns,” commentators are too quick to assume what the text does *not* say, i.e., that they died, and from conclude that only those who produce the fruit of good works, represented by the seed that falls on good soil, are saved. For example: “Other seeds fell where the topsoil was thin (vv. 5-6). Their roots could not penetrate the limestone underneath to obtain necessary moisture from the subsoil. When the hot weather set in, the seeds germinated quickly but did not have the necessary resources to sustain continued growth. Consequently they died. A third group of seeds fell among ‘the thorns’ that grew along the edges of the field (v. 7). These thorn bushes robbed the young plants of light and nourishment, so they died too” (Constable, 329). Rather than whether the plants lived or died, Jesus’ concern seems to be on whether the plants — i.e., the seed that germinated — produced an abundant crop. The sower would be disappointed in the results of his seed falling on the first three soils.

v. 9 *he who has ears* “The listener or reader is suddenly alerted to understand that the parable points beyond itself to a greater reality. The phrase ‘who has ears’ refers to a receptivity concerning the underlying truth of the parable. It amounts to an appeal to hear positively and to respond appropriately. The same exhortation is found verbatim in v 43 and 11:15”

(Hagner, 369). Those who do have ears “do not always use their ears or hear” (Wilkins, 476). use their ears or hear” (Wilkins, 476).

v. 11 *secrets* “The term conveys primarily the sense of a *secret now revealed* but also contains the element of *something inscrutable*” (Blomberg, 215). “The word ‘mysteries’ (Gr. *mysterion*, secrets) comes from the Old Testament and the Hebrew word *raz* (Dan. 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47 [twice]; 4:9). It refers to what God knows will happen in the future. ‘Mysteries’ are ‘secrets,’ namely, divine plans for the future that He reveals to His elect . . . Some have interpreted these parables as revealing ‘the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation.’ This is the view of covenant premillenarians and progressive dispensationalists. Others believe Jesus revealed information about the kingdom in view of its postponement. This is the interpretation of normative dispensationalists.” (Constable, 330, 331).

v. 12 *taken from him* “When anyone uses the spiritual truth he has, that truth grows. More is added to it. By contrast, if he does not use it, he finds that it vanishes away little by little (Plummer says, ‘the purpose is educational to disciples, and disciplinary to those who refuse to become disciples,’ p. 189)” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 340).

v. 14 *fulfilled . . . Isaiah* “Verse 14a probably means the prophecy of Isaiah applies to them — i.e., the pattern of behavior in Isaiah’s time is repeating itself and being completed in Jesus’ day among those who reject him” (Blomberg, 217). “The crowd mirrors the people of Israel to whom the prophet Isaiah ministered. They rejected the message because they were spiritually deadened . . . the parables stimulate a hardening in those who have rejected Jesus, which prohibits them from turning for God to heal them” (Wilkins, 478).

v. 21 *falls away* The second type of soil stands for those whose initial response to the message Jesus preached was enthusiastic reception (‘joy’). This reception gave hope for much fruit to follow. However, external pressures inhibit growth, and because they do not have an adequate rooting in the truth, they soon fade and wither (cf. 5:29). These people are disciples who begin well, but fail to continue to follow the Lord faithfully. Whether they are saved or lost is beside the point” (Constable, 230). The issue is responsiveness rather than salvation (see discussion in Hagner, 381).

Other Texts to Consider

Ephesians 2:9

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Let neither the fears nor the cares of this world keep you from attaining God's purpose for your life as Christ's disciple – that you produce an abundant crop of good works.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

You might remember a few years ago dodging acorns as you walked from your front door to your car. Due to rainfall, temperature and other environmental factors, it was a banner year for acorns. We purchased a super cool rolling thing and took the kids and their friends all around the neighborhood in our red wagon collecting different acorns. We were on a mission to grow some trees on our land near Waco and filled two 40-gallon trash bags. We scattered thousands of acorns all throughout our 40-acre property and I remember thinking about this exact passage in Matthew. Like only God can do, we saw this passage lived out on our land - some acorns the animals ate, some started growing but couldn't survive the heat of summer, and some were choked by other plants or lack of sunshine. Of the thousands of acorns strewn about, six took root. Six. And they're still babies. There is slow and steady growth, but every year we wonder if they'll continue to survive. Like the conversations we have in our neighborhood, not all seeds will produce a fruitful crop. What a comfort to know we are not in charge of the results. We have a wonderfully connected neighborhood that represents all kinds of soil. Our responsibility is obedience, to love big and continue to live out Jesus' calling to make disciples with words and actions. God's got the rest! We are praying for your family to live out the Gospel in your neighborhood!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

1. In this parable, who is the farmer?
2. What does the seed represent?
3. What are the different kinds of soil and what do they represent?

What Do You Think?

What kind of soil are you? What might a good harvest in your life look like?

What Do You Do?

Put together a garden with some of the different types of soil listed in the passage. Plant a seed in each and watch how it grows over the next few weeks.

CORE COMPETENCY: Evangelism

I share Jesus with others with my words and actions.

MEMORY VERSE: Romans 12:13

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME _____

GRADE _____

PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CORE BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CORE VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CORE PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for 12 years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Central Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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**CENTRAL
BIBLE CHURCH**

8001 Anderson Boulevard
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817-275-1315
wearecentral.org