

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 13 (PART 1)

Matthew 13:1-3 - Parables

A parable is a story which has real world context and characters, but a spiritual meaning underneath the surface. Jesus will use stories and elements from his world which will be recognizable by his audience - many of them are agrarian in nature or related to family or money - things which everyone would have been familiar with. But the stories on their own didn't always make sense and were intentionally told in a way to pique the audience's interest.

As we have journeyed through Matthew so far we have an extensive record of his teaching (**5-7**), many miracles and compassionate interactions with people (**8-9**). Then we read of the disciples being sent as his missionaries and Jesus' interaction with the forgotten region of Galilee (**10-11**). Finally, the last chapter (**12**) was full of his discourse with the religious leaders of his day. I highlight this breakdown because I want to remember that Jesus has established himself as an authoritative (or at least interesting) rabbi, a miracle worker and someone who is engaging in a new way with the people of Israel - and as we arrive in chapter **13**, Jesus is going to begin to challenge those who are simply tagging along for a show or a free meal. The parables don't make sense unless you're really listening. So he's going to challenge those with ears to listen (**v. 9**)

The parables typically stand on their own and have their own interpretation. We do not have to try and guess when Jesus will plainly give the meaning. Some parables use similar elements but that doesn't mean they are related to each other. For example, the parable of the sower features seeds which we learn are representative of the gospel (the word of God). In the parable of the wheat and tares, the seed is something else and something else again in the parable of the mustard seed.

This chapter contains a number of parables from Jesus:

- The Parable of the Sower** (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)
- The Parable of the Wheat & Tares** (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)
- The Parable of the Mustard Seed** (Matthew 13:31-32)
- The Parable of the Yeast (Leaven)** (Matthew 13:33)
- The Parable of the Hidden Treasure** (Matthew 13:44)
- The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price** (Matthew 13:45-46)
- The Parable of the Net** (Matthew 13:47-50)
- The Parable of the Householder** (Matthew 13:51-52)

Matthew 13:3-9 - First Parable - Sower, Seed & Soils

v. 9 - *he who has ears, let him hear*

Jesus does not explain this story and so his audience is left to wonder, guess or lose interest. Or, they can ask Jesus for an explanation - something his disciples do in the next section. The explanation/interpretation of the parable is in vs. 18-23. Before he explains himself, he asks if the crowd is listening.

“It is important to note that any lack of understanding was not due to the teacher, but the hearer. Jesus was not teasing them with deliberate confusion, but pointing out that the confusion was a symptom of something fundamentally at fault within the hearer.” (Charles Price, Focus On The Bible: Matthew, page 199)

Matthew 13:9-17 - Why Jesus Spoke In Parables

Q - Do you find it hard to ask questions about spiritual matters? Why or why not?

The disciples ask “why do you speak to them in parables (referencing the large crowds, **v. 2**)?”

*Q - What would cause someone to have ears that don't hear or eyes that don't see? (**v. 14**)*

*Q - How does someone's heart become dull (**v. 15**)*

Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah as a reference point for his teaching.

Isaiah 6:1-7, 8-13 - Isaiah's Prophetic Commissioning

It seems like one of the functions of Jesus' ministry was to identify those who had a heart to know God's word and words and also identify those who did not. How someone responded to Jesus' teaching (not just his miracles) was a point of judgment. Isaiah's ministry, (and apparently part of Jesus' as well) was partly to harden the hearts of the people because they would hear God's word and way and choose their own way and desires instead.

Of course Isaiah would appeal to the nation for humble and repentant hearts, but each person had to decide how they would respond. The same is true for those who hear Jesus' words.

Q - How does this relate to Jesus' use of parables?

If someone hears, understands and returns to the LORD, they can find healing/salvation. If someone ignores, rejects and walks away, they will not. So Jesus' parables are not just cute stories or Christian fables - they are lessons of eternity, truths of the age to come and words that bring with them blessing or judgement based on the response of the hearers.

The moment that is unfolding in this chapter has been something that the prophets and righteous people of old have been longing for and waiting for - and at last it is here. The disciples were encouraged to recognize the moment and desire more with open ears, eyes and hearts. We would do well to do the same today.