

Kingdom parables

Matthew 13 v 1 to 52

Chapter 12 marked the end of Jesus' presentation of the kingdom to Israel. The rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders did not begin with the crucifixion, but in Matthew 12. Starting in Chapter 13 Jesus will only speak to the public in parables (see v 34) – Why? To help us understand this chapter we will begin with verses 10 to 17 and 34 and 35, where Jesus explains why. The real reason may surprise you...

The purpose of the parables (Matthew 13 v 10 to 17, 34, 35)

- According to v 13 to 15 (including the quotation from Isaiah 6 v 9, 10), what was the primary reason why Jesus used parables? ('The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay.')
- In what ways were the disciples privileged (v 11, 16)? What are the "secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (v 11)?

Hint: in this chapter Jesus will "utter what has been "hidden since the foundation of the world" (v 35, quoted from Psalm 78 v 2). The parables will reveal new truths that were not clearly evident in the Old Testament – i.e. truths about 'the Church' (in the mystical sense of the Body of Christ). See also Ephesians 3 v 4 to 6, where Paul explains his knowledge of the "mystery of Christ"...

The parable of the sower and explanation (Matthew 13 v 1 to 9, 18 to 23)

In this well known parable Jesus speaks according to the agricultural customs of the day: seed was scattered first, then it was ploughed into the ground...

- Who is the sower? What is the seed? Who are the birds (v 4)? Why did the same seed produce such different results?

"He who has ears, let him hear" (v 9) – this is not a call for all to listen; rather it is a call for those who are spiritually sensitive to take special note. In summary, (a) the path – without understanding, birds steal the seed away; (b) rocky ground – without root, fail under pressure; (c) among thorns – entangled in the cares of the world; (d) good soil – hearing and understanding lead to bearing much 'fruit' – but why the 'diminishing returns' (100, 60, 30)?

The parable of the weeds and explanation (Matthew 13 v 24 to 30, 36 to 43)

"Weeds" translates the Greek word ζιζανία (zinzania) – the word is used to denote a wild cereal plant that grows in Israel today. It resembles wheat while it is growing, but when it matures the seeds turn black (it shows its true colours!). It must be separated out, because if it gets mixed up with the wheat and you bake bread, it is poisonous...

- According to Jesus' explanation, who is the sower of good seed, what is the field, and who are the good seed? Who do the weeds represent and who is the enemy that sowed them? What is the harvest and who are the reapers? At the end of the age what will happen to the weeds ("law-breakers") and what will happen to the good seed ("righteous")?

[MORE OVER...]

The parables of mustard seed, leaven, treasure, pearl, net (Matthew 13 v 31 to 33, 44 to 52)

- Some think of the mustard seed growing into a tree as a comforting picture of the church growing and providing refuge for many; but who are the “birds” (see v 4)? How big does mustard normally grow?
- “Leaven” is an idiom for sin (why?) – see Matthew 16 v 6, 1 Corinthians 5 v 6 to 8. “Three measures of flour” denotes the fellowship or grain offering (see Genesis 18 v 6), which was not supposed to contain leaven (Leviticus 2 v 11) – so what is this parable really warning us about?
- What “treasure” could be so wonderful that God would give up everything to purchase it (John 3 v 16)? Who is represented by the “pearl of great value” (oysters are not ‘kosher’)? What does the parable of the “net” (which is similar to the “weeds” parable) tell us about the end of the age?