

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 13:10 - 13:17



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 13:10-17, Jesus explains to his disciples that the parables he tells are meant to reveal the mysteries of the spiritual kingdom to those who have ears to hear. He warns them not to cast their pearls before swine, or those without the understanding to receive the message, but to instead reveal the deeper truths to those who are receptive. The speaker notes that this theme is echoed in the Bible's prophecy, where hearts grow dull and resistant to God's messages, but emphasizes that with openness and understanding, one can gain eternal inheritance in the spiritual kingdom.

### Transcript

Last time we were looking at Matthew chapter 13, we read the first of several parables that Jesus told in this chapter. All of them have to do with the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, and tell us something of value about it. As I said last time, the parables were stories that were really true to life, ordinary, unexceptional, generic kinds of stories about things that happen in everyday life.

Farmers planting seeds, women making bread, a mustard seed growing into a great tree, fishermen sorting out their fish after a day's catch, and so forth. These stories were not the kinds of stories that people would listen to for their own sake, because there's nothing out of the ordinary in them. There's no plot.

But the thing is that in the mouth of Jesus, these stories were employed to illustrate important lessons of the kingdom of heaven, but those illustrations were lost on the majority of his listeners, and he intended for them to be lost on the majority of his listeners, as we shall see in the verses that we're going to read next. After Jesus told the story of the, what we call the parable of the sower, some people call it the parable of the soils. This is the story about a man who cast seed by hands full out on his field, and some fell on various kinds of soil, and either, whether on good soil or bad, they produced or did not produce a good crop.

Now, that's not really much of a story, until you begin to understand what it means. To the average listener, it was just giving a slice of life from an agrarian society, which

everyone was already acquainted with. Very unexceptional.

And the disciples came to Jesus. This is in Matthew 13, 10. The disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? And 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.

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. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, Hearing you will hear and shall not understand. Seeing you shall see and not perceive. For 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.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 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. Then he goes on to explain what this parable of the sower really meant.

But we won't get into that yet. He had all these intervening comments that he made which we ought to take a look at. Because here he gives his reason for using parables.

I think when I grew up in Sunday school, I was told that Jesus used parables to clarify spiritual truths. But from what Jesus said, it sounds like he used them to obscure spiritual truths. And as I said last time, I think both are true in their own way.

With the explanation, the parable becomes enlightening. Without the explanation, it communicates nothing clearly. It's just a story about agriculture.

Now, the disciples did receive the explanation. Jesus explained all things privately to his disciples when they were alone. But to the multitudes, he did not.

He only spoke in parables and left them without an explanation. Which, of course, left them totally unenlightened. Now, the disciples recognized this.

Even before he explained anything to them, they were scratching their heads and saying, What in the world? Why are you talking this way, Jesus? Why are you talking to these people in parables? And Jesus said, Well, there's a reason for that. It's part of my plan. He said, Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

Now, here we see a distinction between those that Jesus calls you and those that he calls them. To you it has been given to know. To them it has not been given to know.

Well, who are you? The first group are the disciples themselves, the ones who said, Lord, why are you speaking in parables? He says, Well, because you, the disciples, have been given the privilege to know things that they, who are not disciples, have not been given the privilege to know. In particular, to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, the mysteries of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a mysterious thing, and it's important for us to understand this, because the Jewish people, and most of the people in his crowds were Jewish, did have a concept already of the kingdom of God, based on the Old Testament and their only partial understanding of it.

The Jewish people felt that the kingdom of God was going to be a political kingdom, inaugurated by a militaristic Messiah, who would come in, as David had done a thousand years earlier, and conquer all the Gentiles around, bring them under tribute, elevate Jerusalem and the Jews as the center of all significance in the earth, restore true worship of God, and enforce the worship of the Jewish God upon the Gentiles. This is what many of the Old Testament prophets had said, or at least as it was understood by the Jews. Now, all of those things I just mentioned, there are prophecies in the Old Testament that seem to suggest them, but the Jews of Jesus' day, and prior to that, tended to take these things so literally, that they didn't even recognize the Messiah when he came, because he did not come as a militaristic Messiah to set up a political kingdom, and he did not do in the natural, that is in the material sense, the things that they thought the Messiah would do, but he did all those things in the spiritual sense.

The kingdom of God was therefore to be a spiritual kingdom, rather than a political, material kingdom, and in that, Jesus surprised everybody, because the Jews truly hoped that the Messiah might come and drive away the Romans, and do what David had done, restore the honor and the dignity to the Jewish people, who had been oppressed by the Gentiles for many hundreds of years, and to raise them up to a place of prominence and dignity, but Jesus didn't come to do that, and in not doing that, he disappointed their expectations of what the kingdom was about. However, he did want his disciples to know, and not be disappointed, that he did indeed come and establish the kingdom of God, but it was a different reality than was expected. It was a mysterious thing, it was a mystery to the rabbis, they didn't understand the kingdom of God was a spiritual reality.

One rabbi who later did understand it, was Saul of Tarsus, who we know as the Apostle Paul, and he said once, as he gave us his understanding of the kingdom of God, he said in Romans chapter 14 and verse 17, the kingdom of God is not food and drink, what he means by that, it's not all about the laws that were given to the Jews, about what they could eat and what they couldn't eat, but he said the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Now, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, that's not a political thing, that's a personal spiritual reality. I will testify to you

that I possess the kingdom of God, I have in Christ righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

It's a spiritual thing, it has not changed the political complexion of the world that much, but that's not what the kingdom of God that Jesus came to preach was. And it was a mystery, because the Jews thought they understood what the kingdom was, but Jesus came to bring a different kind of kingdom. And that the mystery or the secret about the kingdom was going to be divulged to Jesus' disciples, but it was not going to be divulged to others.

Remember Jesus said to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, he said, unless you are born again, and Jesus later explained that being born again means born of the Spirit, you have to have a spiritual birth, he said, unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. Now again, that was a surprise to Nicodemus, because like everyone else, he expected the kingdom of God to be political and visible and so forth, but Jesus said to the Pharisees on another occasion, Luke 17, 20, Jesus said, well actually they said, when shall the kingdom appear? And he said, the kingdom is not going to come in that way. He says, the kingdom of God does not come with observation, men will not be able to say, lo, here it is, or lo, there it is.

He said, the kingdom of God is already in your midst, it's already here, it's a spiritual reality you have not seen. And that is the mystery of the kingdom that no one knew except Jesus and those to whom he sought to reveal it. Now because this was a spiritual kingdom coming in, it was going to be in conflict with the other spiritual kingdom that was already around, that no one was noticing either, and that is the kingdom of darkness, with the devil as its leader.

Even the devil appears in this parable of the sower, in the form of birds that come and take the seed away. We'll talk more about the meaning of that later on, but the point is, there is a conflict between kingdoms. There is the kingdom of darkness, holding sway over the souls of all those who are opposed to God, and then there is the kingdom of God, which is the spiritual reality of those who are followers of Jesus Christ.

And therefore, there is a conflict of kingdoms. Now anyone who is invading the territory of a kingdom with an alternative, subversive movement, does not wish to reveal all of his plans to the enemy. In time of war, strategies need to be kept top secret.

We don't want the enemy to know what we are going to do next, or even what our objective is necessarily. You only want to tell those who are truly loyal, so that the message doesn't creep out, and the enemy finds out what you are up to. Now Jesus indicated that the disciples were the guys on his side.

These were the people who were committed to him, through thick and thin. He wanted them to know the strategy. He wanted to tell them the secrets of the kingdom that he

was bringing in.

But those people out there on the hillsides, on the lake shore, who he was talking to, that were not committed to him, he didn't want to spill his guts to them. He didn't want them to know everything. He didn't want to tip his hand, because for all he knew, they might be the enemy.

Or at least on the side of the enemy, which makes them the enemy. So Jesus said, I'm not giving them my secrets. I'm giving them to you, who are my disciples.

But to them, I'm not telling them my secrets. You might remember back in Matthew chapter 7, that Jesus said, do not give what is holy to dogs, and don't cast your pearls before swine. He said that first of all, swine cannot appreciate pearls.

They won't recognize them for the valuable thing they are, and they will even think you're throwing things at them, so they'll turn on you and trample on the pearls, and come after you. So he said, you just don't give your pearls to swine. That's sort of what Jesus is modeling here.

The pearls, the secrets of his kingdom, these valuable things could not be appreciated by those who didn't love God, and who were not committed to following Jesus, and therefore he didn't want to entrust his secrets with them. But his disciples, he explained everything to them, privately. So that's what he says to them when they say, why are you doing this? Why are you telling these people these things in parables? Jesus said, because it's been given to you, but not to them, to know the mysteries of the kingdom.

And then he goes on, he says, 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. That's a strange statement.

What does it mean? If someone has, they will be given more. But if they don't have, they'll have whatever it is they do have taken from them. This is one of those enigmatic, mysterious statements of Jesus.

But in the context, what it seems to mean is this. He's talking about understanding of his teaching. When he says more will be given, he seems to mean more understanding.

So the ones who have some understanding, will be given more understanding. But the ones who don't have any understanding, will not be given more understanding. In fact, what little they think they understand, will be taken from them.

They won't understand at all. Now, what's he talking about? He's talking about spiritual understanding. The disciples were the ones who have, and would be given more.

Those multitudes out there, to whom he spoke in parables, but didn't explain anything,

they were the ones who have not. And even what little they seem to have, would be taken from them. Now what he seemed to be saying is that those who had made the commitment to become disciples of his, had exhibited some spiritual understanding by doing so.

Those who were not making such a commitment, but were just curiosity seekers, just those who were, you know, Jesus was after all a phenomenon, he was a celebrity. So crowds came out to hear what he had to say, but they were just curious. They weren't willing to forsake all and follow him.

They weren't willing to take up their cross, and follow him to the death. That's what discipleship calls people to. There weren't many like that.

The majority just wanted to hear him, they didn't want to do what he said. Now they were not, they didn't have much understanding. I mean the very fact that that was their disposition proves that they didn't have much spiritual understanding, because if you really understand ultimate issues, you know that doing the will of God matters more than anything else in the whole world.

You know that having God on your side matters a great deal more than having anyone else on your side. You know that having an eternal inheritance is much more desirable than having no eternal inheritance, and seeking an inheritance here. Those who have such wrong-headed views, obviously, do not follow Jesus.

But they don't do so because they lack understanding of the nature of reality. They confuse reality. They think that pleasure and luxury and riches and fame and satisfaction in this life, that those are the most desirable things.

And such people will never become followers of Jesus while they have that attitude. But those who follow Jesus were ones who forsook their jobs and their popularity and their families and so forth, in order to be close to Jesus and find out more about the kingdom of God, because they valued God. They valued his kingdom and they wanted to make sure they would be part of it.

They exhibited that they already possessed spiritual understanding, and that they had sought Jesus out to be their leader. So Jesus said they were the ones who have, and they would be given more. And they would ultimately have an abundance.

But those who don't have enough understanding already, even to commit themselves to being followers of his, they're not going to get any more from him. They will be left out in the cold and in the dark. And Jesus said in verse 13, Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

Now, at the end of his first parable in verse 9, Jesus had said, He who has ears to hear,

let him hear. Now Jesus apparently meant his disciples. His disciples would have spiritual ears, as it were, to hear and receive spiritual things.

But these people out there in the crowds, who were not followers of his, he said they hear but they don't hear. They see but they don't see. They don't understand what they're seeing or hearing.

And he says, In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled. Which says, Now this prophecy in Isaiah that he quotes is from Isaiah chapter 6 verses 9 and 10. Actually this prophecy in Isaiah is quoted a great deal in the New Testament.

Jesus quotes it in another setting in John 12 in verse 40. And the Apostle Paul quotes this prophecy also in Acts chapter 28 in verse 26. And it's also quoted again in Romans.

So it's really a key prophecy. Now what is it? It's actually a prophecy about the state of Israel spiritually in the days of Isaiah. And when Jesus said, In them, meaning in the Jews of his generation, this prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled.

What he means is that his generation was in exactly the same spiritual state as was the generation that Isaiah prophesied to. They didn't understand either. And here's what Isaiah said about his generation.

And in quoting Isaiah, Jesus is saying the same applies to the Jewish people of his generation. He says, Hearing you will hear and shall not understand. And seeing you will see and not perceive.

For the hearts of this people has 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 would heal them. Now I think there's some irony in this.

God has brought light to these people. But they close their eyes to it. Why? Well they don't want to repent to be healed.

Now that's where the irony is. Of course Jesus, what he's saying is they really don't want to repent. And what he's saying is, well then that means they also don't want to be healed.

Because that's what would happen. Their land could be healed. If they would turn to God and repent.

However these people, they're blind. They're deaf. Spiritually speaking, they can hear the words of Jesus.

They can see the miracles he does. It's right in front of them. As plain as the nose and the face.

And yet they do not see or hear deeply. They don't see or hear in any way that gives them understanding or perception of what's going on. Or that in any sense motivates them.

One of the scary things it says about these people in verse 15 is, the hearts of these people have grown dull. What he means by this is that their hearts have become insensitive. It's like they're calloused.

That means that they were not always that way. Most people early in life have a certain amount of spiritual sensitivity. But as God begins to reach out and communicate to people, especially as he begins to put his finger on some of the things in their lives that need to change, and he begins to press his claims on their lives, many people resist that.

It's their grain to turn to God and to follow him. But as we resist God's nudgings, we build calluses up so that we build insensitivity. It's not that he's not nudging anymore, it's just that we can't feel it anymore.

But because we can't feel it, we don't ever turn. And so people by stages, by resisting the light, by resisting God's overtures, become more dull of hearing. They become more blind.

They become more insensitive in their heart. And that's a very dangerous place to be. Now Jesus said, in contrast to those who are blind and deaf, he said to his disciples, but blessed are your eyes, for they do see, and your ears, because they do hear.

That is, when they heard and saw Jesus, they recognized his significance and became followers of his, as any person would who properly understood the nature of things. And he said, 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. Now, what he means, of course, is that in the Old Testament, there were many generations of godly people, prophets, godly kings like David, you know, just some humble, pious Jewish people who loved the Lord, and they looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, they looked forward to the coming of the kingdom of God, but they did not live to see it, it did not happen in their time.

And Jesus said, you know, these people here that I am telling parables to, they do not see or recognize what it is they are seeing, they do not hear or perceive what I am saying, but you do, and boy are you fortunate, because what you are seeing and what you are hearing is the very thing that godly people throughout the ages have anticipated and did not live to see. They did not have opportunity to see it, because it did not materialize in their lifetime, but it is happening before your eyes. Now, some people



would say that all of us who have lived since the time of Christ have had the opportunity to see things that earlier generations had not been able to see.

I would say that is true, and we are greatly privileged if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Now, some of you listening to this broadcast probably do not. You probably hear the word of God, it just goes right off you like water off a duck's back.

But if the Holy Spirit is working on your heart, then when you hear the words of Jesus, you stand at attention and say, there is something here God has for me to learn. And I hope that as we go through the Gospel of Matthew together, we will all learn something. However, we are out of time for this broadcast, so we will have to learn more next time as we continue through Matthew chapter 13 and the parables of Jesus.