

# SOLVING THE KINGDOM'S MANY MYSTERIES

BY DR. JERRY VINES

*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series  
from **Jerry Vines Ministries**  
2295 Towne Lake Parkway  
Suite 116 #249  
Woodstock, GA 30189

## Let's Begin

*From childhood, I have heard the saying "God works in mysterious ways." I am unsure where it came from, but I know there is some truth in it. Chapter 12 sets the stage for Jesus' many parables of the Kingdom which Matthew records in Chapter 13.*

*The Pharisees, representing the Jewish nation, clearly rejected Jesus, His teachings and surely the preposterous idea that He was their Messiah. And, for the first time, we see behind the curtain that already in place was a conspiracy to put Him to death (12:14).*

*Because of the rejection by His own people (John 1:11), His method of teaching took a dramatic shift in focus. Jesus' shift in teaching sought to answer the obvious: "What happens to the Kingdom when the Kingdom's King is rejected?"*

*Chapter 13 is packed with seven parables which Jesus used to teach about the Kingdom of Heaven. As we explore this chapter, we will follow this outline:*

### I. Revealing the Mystery of Kingdom Parables (vv. 1-50)

### II. Relating the Meaning of Kingdom Parables (vv. 51-58)

## I. Revealing the Mystery of Kingdom Parables (vv. 1-50)

Matthew wrote that Jesus "spoke many things unto them in parables" (v. 3). Just what exactly is a parable? The term itself means "to place along side." *A parable is a truth in the physical world used to explain a truth in the spiritual world.* Some would say a parable is an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

While the earthly part is clear and most recognizable to virtually anyone, the "heavenly" part is a mystery. In fact, no one can know it unless God reveals it. That's the "mystery" about parables (v. 17).

Even the disciples wondered aloud to Jesus why He would speak in parables (v. 10). Jesus' response was twofold. **First, Jesus noted that parables conceal** (vv. 13-15). Again, no matter how simple the earthly story is, no one can know the "heavenly" meaning unless God reveals it. This brings us to the second purpose of parables: **parables reveal** (vv. 16-17). And, the mystery is only revealed to those who follow Christ (v. 18). Let's look at these eight parables Jesus gives and note how each reveals a particular aspect of the Kingdom.

The first parable Jesus told pertains to soil (vv. 3-9; 18-23). The seed that the farmer sows is the Word of God (cp. Luke 8:11). This is clear from Jesus' own interpretation (v. 23). The Kingdom is built upon the spreading of God's word, a word that is wonderful, powerful, and fruitful. Who knows what the Word planted in the heart can do? But it must be planted to do anything.

**The Bible says that the Word of God has within it the genetic code of eternal life** (1 Peter 1:23; Hebrews 4:12). The focus of this first parable is clearly the soil, which, according to Jesus, is the human heart (v. 19). The growth depends upon the quality of the soul.

In Jesus' parable, there are four kinds of hearts, each revealing a different level of receptivity to the Word of God. First there is the *unresponsive heart* (v. 19). This heart is like a path trodden down by the busy traffic of human feet. It becomes virtually like concrete. It may look good and wear well but there's no room for the Word of God, anymore than the farmer's seed scattered on a beaten down path. The seed just cannot penetrate the surface. This heart is completely indifferent to anything spiritual. Note well that the Word leaves no imprint on the soul. Consequently, Satan easily removes any trace that the Word was even present.

Second, there is the *impulsive heart* (vv. 20-21). This is the soil about which Jesus spoke (v. 5). It's a thin layer of soil covering a massive limestone bed. When the seed is spread, it gets immediate life, life that only lasts but a day or two. Because the roots cannot penetrate the rock, the sun cooks the plant as if it was in a brick oven. Jesus notes here the response to the Word



### Reflection Connection

*Reflect on the statement "God works in mysterious ways." Why do you think it's so popular? Is it true? Explain.*

### Reflection Connection

*What are parables? Why were they so popular? Are parables still popular today? Think about your reasons.*

### Reflection Connection

*Why would God desire to speak in mysteries?*

of God is one of sheer, shallow emotion. There is no depth. When the least bit of criticism comes or pressure mounts, the Word that had any impact on the person's life quickly is baked to a crusty hull.

Third, there is the *destructive heart* (v. 22). The farmer sows the seed but only into a pool of seeds already there. Notice, that this soil does not suffer as the former did. This soil is rich and very receptive to seeds being planted. In fact, it may be too receptive, for the weeds and brush spring to life, choking to death any hope the good seed possessed in taking root. The heart is simply preoccupied with too many other things it deems good. The "deceitfulness of riches" overpowers the seed and life escapes.

Finally, there is the *productive heart* (v. 23). This heart receives the Word, understands the Word, holds fast the Word, obeys the Word and even pollinates by bringing forth fruit from the Word.

The second parable focuses on the sower (vv. 24-30; 37-43). In this story about the Kingdom, two sowers are at work, one in daytime and the other after dark. The first sower tills the field and sows good seed in good soil. However, the second sower targets the field only to corrupt it by sowing wild "tares" (v. 25). The purpose of the enemy (v. 28) is not to plant but to poison; not to reap but to ruin, not to harvest but to harass. According to Jesus, the enemy is none other than the Devil (v. 39).

Though the farmer's crew wanted to pluck the tares up (v. 28), He had another plan: "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let them grow together until the harvest" (vv. 29-30).

Why would Jesus say let the tares and the wheat grow together? Several reasons present themselves. First, one cannot get rid of weeds. A field must always be worked. Similarly, one can't completely get evil out of the world nor even the church. It may be checked but it cannot be eradicated.

Second, it's hard to tell the difference between the tares and wheat. A saved person may be seriously struggling and, thus not a tare. On the other hand, an unsaved person may be the nicest person in the church!

Third, one can hurt innocent wheat by attempting to take the tares (v. 29). The farmer cared more for the wheat's health than the tare's harassment. Fourth, it needs to be given to the Lord. No human effort can eliminate error. God has His own plan (15:13).

The third parable is about the seed (vv. 31-32). Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard. Which in deed is the least of all seeds..." This parable is the first in a string of several very small parables Jesus gave in revealing the mystery of God's kingdom. There are three features of the "mustard seed" that will assist us in understanding the mystery.

First, the mustard seed is small. Jesus says it's the "least of all seeds" (v. 32). Among the Rabbis of Jesus' day, the mustard seed was used as an image of anything minute.

Second, the mustard seed is significant. According to Jesus, "When it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs and becometh a tree" (v. 32). Mustard plants are known to grow 15 feet tall! The tiny seed possesses life. Peter would later speak of the "incorruptible seed" which "liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23).



**Reflection Connection**

*Does the devil still involve himself in stealing the Word of God? Can he steal the Word from Christians? Why or why not?*

**Reflection Connection**

*What role does good works play in salvation?*

**Reflection Connection**

*Is the real point of the mustard seed about its size? Please explain.*

**Reflection Connection**

*Do you think a time is coming when no gospel invitation will be given? If so, when will this be? Will it still be possible for a person to be saved at that time?*

Third, the mustard seed is strong. It possesses an unusual bite. The Gospel is like that. The very message Jesus gave was the message for which the Pharisees were plotting to kill Him. The Gospel is an offense.

The fourth parable which revealed the mystery of God's Kingdom focused on saturation (v. 33). "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven;" Jesus noted. The leaven is the Gospel which the church takes to the world. Preaching the Gospel is the way God chooses to save people. Preaching the Gospel is like a saturation process. It affects the entire bin of meal. *No message has ever come close to penetrating and changing the world like the Gospel message.*

The fifth parable, which reveals the mystery focuses on a secret (v. 44). The treasure of the Gospel has been hidden in secret; but, once it is found, *no price is too much to pay for discovering the Gospel.*

When Jesus came, He found a nation in failure. God's select people were like a treasure hidden in a field.

Rome was completely in charge, as God's treasure was out of circulation. They had no prophet, no power and no purpose.

Jesus uncovered the treasure and for a brief time Israel got a glimpse of their destiny. Jesus taught God's truth, performed miracles and was readily accepted by the masses. By the time He rode into Jerusalem, however, the people He came to rescue were posed to place Him on a rugged cross and crucify Him.

The sixth parable revealing the Kingdom's mystery focuses on a search (vv. 45-46). Jesus speaks of a merchant on a quest "seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

One must be careful with this parable; it's a bit tricky. Some believe Jesus is the pearl and upon seeking Him and finding Him, we sell all we own to have Him. As appealing as this may be, the very opposite is the case. We do not seek Jesus (Romans 3:11): instead Jesus seeks us! *He came to seek and save that which was lost* (Luke 19:10).

Nor can we buy Jesus. The Savior is not for sale. If anything, He's free! The proper interpretation is that we are the pearl and the merchant man is Jesus. He gave everything to purchase us (Mark 10:45).

The final parable Jesus gave to reveal the mystery of the Kingdom focuses on separation (vv. 47-50). Jesus uses the imagery of a dragnet which swept the sea gathering in all kinds of fish. Two truths flow from this parable.

First, is the Gospel invitation, and the emphasis is on the present (v. 47). We live "presently" when the Gospel is preached and the call is given to come to Christ. Jesus promises all who come will receive perfect rest (11:28-30) and no one will be cast out (John 6:37). This is now. The Kingdom's door remains

*Preaching the Gospel is the way God chooses to save people.*



### Reflection Connection

*Satan opposes the Kingdom of God. Is it possible he can stop the Kingdom of God on this earth? Explain.*

### Golden Greek Nugget

“Parable” is a common word found on the lips of Jesus. The Greek term “*paraballo*” is found some fifty times and literally means “lay beside” or “compare.” So a parable is a comparison of one thing with another. Jesus used common, everyday items to teach the truth of God. While He spoke of “sowing seeds,” “leaven,” and a “fish net” then, He probably would talk of cell phones, computers and iPods if He was teaching today. Jesus always makes truth relevant to where we are.

### Wrap Up

*Matthew 13 can be overwhelming. But when we understand that the mysteries kept secret for so long have been revealed to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, an excitement builds within. God desires not to veil Himself but reveal Himself! He has done so through Jesus. Will you not trust in Jesus today? Will you cast all your burdens, fears and frustrations about life upon Him? Will you not turn from your sin and turn to Jesus?*

open to every person who will walk through it. Believe on Jesus. Come by faith and you will enter into life.

But there is another truth to this parable; it is the Gospel separation (vv. 48-50). The emphasis here is on the future. According to Jesus, “the angels will come forth and sever the wicked from among the just” (v. 49). The separation will not only be final, for Jesus puts it at the “end of the world” (v. 49a), but it will also be factual, as the angels separate the “wicked from among the just.” (v. 49b). In addition, the separation is fatal (vv. 41-42). The reality Jesus offers could be no more horrifying—a furnace of fire.

## II. Relating the meaning of the Kingdom Parables (vv. 51-58)

Upon Jesus finishing these teachings, Matthew recorded our Lord’s travels back to Capernaum. He taught in the synagogue there (v. 54) but did few miracles (v. 58). The unbelief of the Pharisees was beginning to take its toll on the townsfolk. They openly questioned Jesus’ wisdom (v. 54) and were even offended at Him personally (v. 57). The son of God who took on human flesh was poised as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). How do these revealed mysteries relate to Christians?

**First, we cannot understand the mystery unless God chooses to reveal it** (vv. 16-17). The truths found in Matthew 13 had been kept secret from the foundation of the world. No Old Testament text reveals what is found there. Jesus Himself unfolds the mystery.

*Plant the Word of God and leave the results to Him.*

**Second, we must understand the hindrances to the Kingdom.** Satan

opposes the Kingdom and robs it of everything he can. He snatches the Word from a person’s heart and suffocates the seed with pleasures of this world. He persecutes and plants tares in God’s garden. He’s always poised with a bottle of poison to corrupt the Kingdom of God.

**Third, this means that good and evil, right and wrong, Christian and non-Christian will coexist together until the end of this age.** While we should do all we can to better society by being salt and light, we must not possess illusions that evil will go away or tares will cease to grow. Our focus must ever be to plant the Word of God and leave the results to Him.

**Fourth, a day is coming when the separation for which we long will be complete.** The garden will be complete. The garden will be free of tares and evil; sin, wrong and death will be no more.

**Finally, we must remain active in the world but never become a part of it.** If we expect to plant the seed we must be busy at it in the field. A sleeping church is a grand opportunity for Satan to sow tares. We must remain alert.

