

Introduction: As you know, after my current detailed study of Matthew 13, I realized that the interpretations I had heard all my life for 4 parables did not seem to fit the context in which they are embedded. In Part 5, I gave you specifics on the things that bothered me. The four parables in question were the “Mustard Seed,” “Leaven,” “Hidden Treasure,” and “Pearl of Great Value.”

This past week I continued my search for written information either confirming my new understanding, or else providing a satisfactory explanation of where I went wrong. I discovered several commentaries having the interpretation that now seems right to me.

An article by the Blue Letter Bible organization is perhaps easiest to find. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Mat/Mat_13.cfm The Blue Letter Bible organization is conservative and non-denominational. I have examined their Statement of Faith and it looks fine. While I was convinced the interpretations I gave you are correct, it was a comfort to me to find these examples

Parable of the “Dragnet”: Matthew 13:47-50, *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

In Matthew 4:19b, Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, *“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”* As the number of disciples increased to 12, Jesus made them all “fishers of men.” The idea in the “Sowers” parable is that when the gospel is presented, some believe but for various reasons others do not believe. The “Dragnet” is related in that at the end of the age, the world is still a mixture of righteous and unrighteous.

Consider the purpose of a dragnet. A dragnet is designed to catch everything in the area through which it is dragged. Dragnets are big, both wide and deep, weighted at the bottom by lead, and designed to sweep at the bottom of the sea. Dragnets indiscriminately gather whatever they encounter. Typically one end of the net is fixed to one boat, the other end to another boat. The two boats drag the net between them,

sweeping a section of water. The net is then hauled to the shore, the catch sorted into good and bad.

In the “Dragnet,” the sea represents the world (as does the field in the “Sower”). God’s dragnet sweeps the world catching all kinds of people, righteous and unrighteous. At the end of the age, angels will sort the dragnet’s catch keeping the good and discarding the bad.

The “Dragnet” parable appears to teach that there will be no general conversion of the world’s people. At the end of time, the world will remain a mixture of righteous and unrighteous. As indicated in the ‘Wheat and Tares,’ the church itself will always have some counterfeit believers. Counterfeits can only be identified and removed at the end of the age.

Matthew 13:50 says, when the fish in the dragnet are sorted, the bad are thrown *“into the fiery furnace.”* The “Wheat and Tares” has a similar statement. At the end of the age, the tares will be gathered and thrown into the furnace.

The “Dragnet’s” focus is on judgment. God impartially offers a call for everyone to come to Him. Not everyone does. God’s dragnet gathers in everyone, good and bad. At the end of the age, the righteous and unrighteous are separated and judged. God’s judgment will be absolutely fair, but His justice does include punishment for the unrighteous as well as rewards for the righteous.

The “Wheat and Tares” clearly says that it is not the church's role to judge. That is an important constraint not always observed. Different Christian denominations often are in conflict with one another over interpretations of Scripture that are judged to be incorrect.

The church’s role is to declare the gospel and to disciple those who believe. The gospel is to be offered to all people. At the last judgment, angels will separate righteous from unrighteous, both from within the church and throughout the world. I assume that the “right” and “wrong” of different Scripture interpretations will become clear at that time.

Parable of the “Householder”: Matthew 13:51-52, *“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.”* ⁵² *And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

Is it possible the disciples actually understood all the things Jesus was teaching them? Unlikely as it seems in view of comments recorded in Scripture, Jesus took no issue with their statement. The disciples view of their understanding implied a commitment on their part they were not yet capable of honoring.

The opposition of Jewish leaders to Jesus and His teaching was a steadily increasing threat. The leaders were becoming more committed to stopping Jesus. Apparently, because of that increasing opposition, Jesus began speaking in parables. Some would understand the true meaning of the parable, some would not. Some would misunderstand completely. Jesus would explain the meaning to His disciples.

Speaking specifically to the disciples, Jesus made an enigmatic comment, ***“Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*** What did Jesus mean? Jewish scribes were clerks employed as writers, but most were also teachers of the law. Ezra was a scribe, but was also an expert teacher of the law (Ezra 7:6).

The point Jesus is making with this statement about scribes is that His disciples, who have just acknowledged their understanding of all Jesus was teaching them, are now accountable for teaching that understanding to others. Their teaching is to be valuable, a treasure to those who hear. They are to bring out of their storehouse of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding treasures both new and old. The “old” refers to their understanding of the law and prophecy. The “new” refers to their understanding of the kingdom of heaven as revealed to them by Jesus.

Jesus brought to them new insight into things they already knew. But He also brought them new knowledge and insight into the Kingdom of Heaven and the part they would play in spreading the good news.

In today’s world, the application of this passage is that ministers and teachers (today’s scribes) should not be novices (1 Timothy 3:6). They should be people of wisdom, knowledge and experience, well acquainted with the interpretation and significance of both Old and New Testaments. Psalm 19:7-11, ***“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.”***

The disciples ask Jesus why He is speaking in parables.

Matthew 13:10-17 (The Purpose of the Parables): *“Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*

Jesus means when a parable is heard by people, who are open and sensitive to spiritual truth, it will add to their understanding. The same parable heard by people, who are not open or not sensitive to spiritual truth, will either not understand or misunderstand and end up in worse condition than before they heard the parable.

Consider an analogy perhaps helpful in understanding this principle. The heat of the sun causes different effects on different substances. The same sun which softens, or melts wax can at the same time harden or bake clay, evaporate water, produce sunburn on a person's exposed skin, and cause photosynthesis in plants.

Generalizing Jesus' statement about parables, we can say, a gospel presentation may humble receptive hearts and lead to repentance. At the same time, that gospel message may harden other hearts and cause greater disobedience.

Barclay noted that a parable can conceal truth from a person too lazy to think or too blinded by prejudice to see. Parables reveal truth to one who desires truth. It conceals truth from those who do not wish to see and accept truth. Carson notes, that means when Jesus spoke a parable to a crowd, it did not simply convey information, it was a challenge to the hearer to understand.

The cause of Jesus beginning to speak in parables seems to have been the increasing rejection of Jesus and His teaching by Jewish leaders. But in speaking in

parables, Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of Messiah speaking in ways hardened hearts would hear but not understand.

Summary of the Parables of Matthew 13: In Matthew 13:10, when the disciples ask why Jesus is speaking in parables, Jesus says He is revealing mysteries of the kingdom. There are 8 parables in the chapter. Six begin with the phrase, "*The kingdom of heaven is like...*" The first parable, the "Sower" does not begin that way, but it depicts the fact that not all who hear the gospel will believe. The seventh parable confirms that at the end of the age, the world will still be a mixture of believers and unbelievers. Keep in mind that these parables were all spoken before the church was formed. For a time after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, people who followed Him were considered a sect of Judaism. Followers of Jesus were later first called "Christians" in Damascus.

The second and seventh parables are both story parables describing a mixed group of good and bad (wheat and weeds/good and bad fish). Jesus explained both parables. The explanations are similar. Both concern the end of the age when Jesus comes again, and angels will separate the good from the evil.

Of the 8 parables, the first 4 describe: (1.) Sowing the word in the world with mixed results, some believe, and some do not. (2.) The enemy sows counterfeit believers in world and in the community of believers. (3.) The working of sin against the church, begins with small effects but will grow large. (4.) The leaven of evil will spread to all the world including the church. Jesus spoke these 4 parables to a mixed crowd by the lake while sitting in a boat.

The last 4 parables in this chapter were spoken in private to the disciples and describe: (1.) The great value Jesus assigns to the treasure of future believers who are individually hidden in the world. (2.) Collectively, all believers, represent a pearl of great value. (3.) God's dragnet catches all the people of the world. At the end of the age, they will be separated into righteous and unrighteous. (4.) Everyone who teaches God's Word is to have knowledge and wisdom of both the law (OT) and the kingdom of heaven (NT). They are to be able to preach and teach God's Word such that the hearers can understand and apply that Word to their lives.

Taken together, the 8 parables describe the development of the community of believers, formidable obstacles it will encounter, and its ultimate victory.

What's Next: Luke 15. Parables of the lost.