

Matthew 20-11-29a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. It is a privilege to be here with you on this post-Thanksgiving opportunity for fellowship and for study of the Word of God. We're going to be resuming this morning in Matthew chapter 13.

Matthew chapter 13. You're going to be turning in your Bibles to that passage as we begin. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll get started.

Father, we are so grateful for your grace, your patience, your faithfulness to us when we are unsteady and inconsistent. We recognize the distance that separates us from your perfect glory and your perfect standard of righteousness, but we are so grateful for the Lord Jesus Christ who has bridged that gap, and in Him we have redemption. In Him we have forgiveness.

In Him we have standing and the privilege of addressing ourselves to you and of being sealed by your Holy Spirit for the grace which is to come at the return of the Lord Jesus. We pray that as we invest the time this morning in seeking a better understanding of your Word and your purpose for us, that God the Holy Spirit will teach us, will impress these truths on our hearts, will use them to cleanse us and to motivate us so that our faith, our hope, and our love will reflect the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth as His body and as the people for whom He will soon return. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We have begun Matthew chapter 13 after a long absence looking at the end times. We're going to continue that study this Thursday, and just by way of schedule notes, next Sunday will not be live church.

I will be out of town, and so we'll have another golden oldie courtesy of our faithful production engineer and his magic in bringing the past into the present. But this morning we are in Matthew chapter 13 and looking at Jesus delivering the parable of the soils. We saw last time how important the context is.

And to do that, to pick that up, we looked at the end of chapter 12 and this episode where Jesus' mother and brothers appear. And what was the conclusion that we drew? We'll start out the morning with a little pop quiz. What is the significance of Jesus' mother and brothers coming? What did they want to do? It says it twice.

They wanted to speak with Him. Jesus says, those who do the will of my father are my mother and my brothers and my sisters. And the key there is that in a crowd, a great crowd so large that He's going to have to get into a boat and push off from the shore once He leaves the house.

Who gets priority? And you'll remember we reviewed this last Sunday. We prioritize our relatives. It's not just any old body.

It's my mother. It's not just any old body. It's my brother or my sister.

And they have privilege. They have right of approach. Make a hole, as we say.

Make a way. Let them through. Oh, they're my priority people.

Jesus says, you know who my priority people are? Someone who wants to speak with me like my mothers and my brothers and my sisters. That's how you're going to be treated. If you are approaching and if you are interested, you have the priority of family.

And this is an important precursor to the parable. Let's quickly review the parable. This is perhaps the most well-known of all of Jesus' parables.

So we don't have to agonize over the details. In verse three, a sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some fell by the wayside.

The birds came and devoured it. Some fell on stony places, not much depth of earth. And the plants immediately spring up because they have no depth of earth.

But when the sun was up, they were scorched. And because they had no root, they withered away. Some fell among thorns.

The thorns sprang up and choked them. Others fell on good ground and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some 60 and some 30. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Very important addendum. Jesus doesn't always tack that on to the end of his parables, but he does here. He that has an ear to hear, let him hear.

What's the difference in having an ear and hearing with it? It's the difference between perception and understanding. You can perceive what someone says. You can get the words, but it can make no sense.

There's never been a more pertinent application of this than recently in the political arena. People on one side of politics look at the proponents and speakers for that point of view and think they're crazy as loons. What are they thinking? And you don't know which side I'm talking about because each side thinks that about the other.

The left thinks the right are crazy and are led by crazies. The right thinks the left is crazy and led by crazies. We hear what they're saying, but the way it is perceived and understood differs.

Some people think, well, that's the most sane, intelligent, thoughtful, wise. I don't think so. What is Jesus saying when he says, he that has an ear to hear, let him hear? How do

we know if what we're picking up is properly understood and properly interpreted? It's a scary thing.

What if you're wrong? What if the other side, that many people, when they look at the other side, there is hate, there's disparagement, there is canceling, the level of bitterness. Just in the recent election, there are now prominent people, senators, encouraging people to make a list of those who supported the other side, and they've published these lists. These are people they're going to go after.

They want to ruin their personal life. They want to ruin their career. They want to dox them, as they say.

You've seen this term, dox, which is to put out the documentation on where they live, where they work, call up their employer and complain, try to get them fired, trying to ruin their life because they disagree with me. I think that their beliefs are not just wrong, but dangerous. They need to be destroyed.

They need to be socially destroyed. They need to be politically destroyed. They need to be removed from the public forum.

I don't want their words and their thoughts to be heard by the public anymore. It's done. You can see there is a threat to their well-being.

Your procedure, your gathering, your activity is a threat to the public. Your words and your thoughts are a threat to the public. Your viewpoint and your perspective are a threat to the public, and anything that is a threat to the public can and should be suppressed.

This is evil thinking. Don't engage in it just because you think you're right. Everybody thinks they're right, and everybody vindicates their behavior, their criticism, their condemnation, their vituperation, their anger based on, well, but I'm right.

Well, how do you know you're right? That's what this parable gets at. That's what Jesus is talking about here. What are you going to do when actual truth hits? This seed is not bad seed.

It's not seed from tares. It's not seed from thorns and thistles. This is good seed, and the identity of this seed is critical to understanding this passage.

First and foremost, you know that this seed that Jesus is talking about is of God. Now, how could anyone possibly fail to take it in so that it sits on the surface and is carried away by the birds? This ought to scare us that we can think we're right and be so wrong as these people. They didn't just wake up in the morning and twist the ends of their mustache and say, aha, I'm going to be an evil rascal today.

I'm going to reject the truth and embrace the lie. The people who rejected the seed that Jesus was sowing thought they were right, and they were just as sure that they were right as you are that you're right, and as I am that I'm right. This is the problem with the human soul.

I've given you this illustration before, and I'll run through it very quickly because you know the details, but long years ago when I was in Lebanon, I was sent there to help them do a better job of shooting artillery. In order to make sure the guns are lined up properly so that if you give a direction and a distance and say shoot some artillery rounds in this direction and shoot them this distance so that they will impact, detonate, fragment, and wreak havoc on the target, you have to have a genuine directional reference. Where is north, right? So in the absence of survey and in the absence there was no such thing as GPS or any of this, how do you know which guns are pointing? You've installed yourself in a battery position and you pull all the weapons in and line them up.

How do you know any given weapon? What direction is it pointing? And you've got to be a lot more precise than northeast or southeast. In artillery, direction is so important that a circle is not divided into 360 degrees, it's divided into 6,400 slices. So a very slight variation because you think about distance and a very slight difference in angle can make a distance of hundreds of meters on the other end of a round that you're shooting a couple of clicks away.

So I went over there and they said we don't understand every time we shoot a mission, we start hearing reports of our own people getting blown up and civilian neighborhoods and people we're trying to protect are getting destroyed and even injured and killed and we're scared to fire a mission. We don't know what's the matter. Well, their reference, the way you line up howitzers in an artillery position is by using an aiming circle in those days.

It's all done by GPS and computers now but in those days it was manual. The aiming circle is much like what you used to see surveyors use. It's a thing on a tripod and it's got a magnetic needle in it and you look on the map and you find out the declination constant which at this particular patch of ground the difference between magnetic north and true north is this much.

And so you line everything up on magnetic north and then you slip a ring so that you have true north lined up. If there's a three degree difference between magnetic north and true north you slip it what you would call three degrees. It's all done in mils so it's very precise.

Well, these batteries had been laid with aiming circles but they set their aiming circle right next to a power pole that had gigantic cables going up carrying thousands of volts and thousands of amps really more accurately of current flowing through these. And if

you know anything about electricity, electricity flowing through a wire creates a magnetic field. This is how motors work.

This is what makes things turn and go is magnetism induced in the coils of wire that are inside electric motors. Well, this magnetic field was powerful and moved the needle significantly in their aiming circle so when they looked at it and thought the needle was pointing at magnetic north it was not. It was significantly off and they didn't stop to think about their procedure was fine but the placing of that aiming circle conveniently next to this power pole threw their reference off.

They trusted their aiming circle and their aiming circle was wrong and they killed people as a result. Killed innocent civilians, killed their own troops but everything looked right. There is a way that seems right to a man but the ends thereof are the ways of death.

Everything was right. The procedure was flawless but the reference was off. I'm here to tell you from the word of God this morning that we need to exercise great caution when we trust our inner reference, our inner magnetic compass that tells us well I'm right.

I'm right about this. How do we endeavor to interpret the word of God? What's the thing we always look at when we go to a passage? Context. Then we look at context and then we look at context.

What is the setting? What is the surrounding? What is the environment around that passage? When we're thinking about issues we need to be cautious and look at the environment. Am I getting my viewpoint because I only listen to one source of news or I only hang around with one kind of people and we're all the same? I've told you in the past that when I left the Marine Corps and started my seminary career I went to a school, wonderful school, did a great job teaching the languages but I only ever heard one point of view and it was a relatively narrow and dogmatic point of view and for the reasons we're going to see in this parable I left that school and went down to Dallas Theological Seminary where you hear a lot of wrong things. There's a lot of disagreement.

There was a great controversy or as the British say controversy at the time about dispensations and there was a new line of thought called progressive dispensationalism that was coming out challenging classic dispensationalism, getting into trying to weave in covenant theology into dispensations. It's a long, gory, relatively boring story to anybody that wasn't imbroglioed in it but we need to hear the other side. We need to listen to opposing points of view, differing points of view, other perspectives.

We need to be balanced. We need to be anchored. We need to be fair.

We need to be non-confrontational. The Bible is strongly against argument, bitterness, hatred, envy, all of the things that you see characterizing believers in this political season, in this social season as things change. It doesn't matter how right we think we

are and it's possible to be wrong.

The people that Jesus is describing in this parable who don't receive the seed productively all think they're right and their little internal reference that says hey I'm right about this is off and sometimes when I think I'm right, my internal reference for rightness is off and the reason is the power pole of my fallen nature warps it. As Paul Simon so famously said in my youth, a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. We hear what we want to hear.

We have confirmation bias is one way of describing it and when we hear something we agree with, we nod our head. When we hear something we don't agree with, we shake our head. The reason I'm belaboring this is it is what Jesus is getting at in this parable.

It's great to say well I may not be a hundredfold field but you know the seed hits me and it goes in and it springs up and there's fruit and I see the influence and the power of the Lord in my life so these other soils don't apply to me. Oh yes they do. Yes they do.

Don't kid yourself. Don't be fooled. Don't be deceived.

Let no one deceive you. All of us have all of this kind of soil somewhere in our soul. What do we do? We concentrate on the things that go right.

We concentrate on the things that work well. We like to think about where we have achieved and succeeded and we choose not to think about the hard parts, the bad parts, the rocky soil, the thorny briary soil that chokes the seed, the places where it doesn't even soak in. I'm going to listen to a different Bible class.

I'm going to think about a different subject. I'm going to find something that as the apostle later says people like to have their ears tickled. It's stimulating, it's fun, it's interesting but as I'm occupied with the fun and the interest I don't have to think about the doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.

It's like fun facts. Did you know that the world's deepest hole is over here and the world's highest hill is over here? They've got the tallest hill down there in Texas. You can go see it.

What a boring sight but we want to think about things other than what the Holy Spirit is trying to change inside us because change is hard. We are change averse and the older we get the more change averse we are. I like what's familiar.

I like what's predictable. I don't want to be challenged. I don't want to have to work on myself.

It's more convenient to blame the situation, blame the people, blame the virus, blame the government, blame whatever you want. I don't want to look within myself and realize

that my reference, the thing that tells me what is right and what is wrong isn't working properly. Just think about politics.

Think about policy for various important and central issues right now. Wide divergence on what people think should be done personally and nationally and internationally. Wide divergence, strong disagreement.

You wouldn't think that a piece of paper with a couple of strings to go around your ears could create such strong feeling but it does. It's people who hate masks. It's people who think you are an evil, shameless, dangerous rascal if you don't wear one and then pick your venue.

They're about to ramp a lot of that up. Well, the level of confidence. Just think about the people.

Pick an issue that you know you disagree with some other people. I see people doing this. I think we ought to do that.

I voted for this. They voted for that. Remember how right you feel.

That's how right they feel. They don't feel wrong. If they're right about something and I'm wrong and they're looking at me, their feeling of rightness and my feeling of rightness are just as strong.

What is the first and major point for this session this morning? You cannot trust your feeling of rightness. Don't trust it. There is a way that seems right to a man.

Seems right. Feels right. Got to be right.

And it leads to death. It can be death in relationship. It is death in terms of spiritual production, spiritual growth, spiritual understanding, progress in service to God and in reflecting His glory and representing the Lord Jesus Christ.

It kills it. Your sense of rightness can kill the reason God put us on this earth. Kills it.

Useless. You're a liability. You're a casualty.

Enemy of the cross. Fallen from grace. People that Paul was talking to in the Galatian region there, those churches in Galatia, felt like the law ought to still be incorporated.

It shouldn't be either or. It ought to be both and. We should have the law and Christ.

And they were wrong. And Paul said, you are cut off from Christ. You are fallen from grace.

All of you who think that not only should you follow the law, but you should force a lot of other people to follow the law that you think is right. So this is really important. It's a

familiar parable.

It's easy to glide right through it and say, oh yeah, the seed in the soils. The sower and the seed and the soil. I know who the birds are.

I know what the thorns and thistles are. I know what the stony ground is. I know 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold.

Yeah. What's next? What comes after this? Where are we going? Think about it. Jesus gives this parable and the key to it here, if you move to the central section, this is a chiasm within a chiasm.

So you have the portion of the parable that we read beginning in four and ending in nine. Then the disciples come and say to him, why do you speak to them in parables? And you have that central section that goes from verse 10 through verse 17. Then in verse 18, he explains the parable.

And these 23 verses for a single parable is the longest parable in the gospels. So it's important. 23 verses.

Many times Jesus puts a parable in a single verse, 23 verses. Is it important? It's in three of the four gospels. Luke and Mark also record this parable.

So yes, it is important and we need to be sure we understand the point. So in the central section, why do you speak to them in parables? 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. Now talking about controversy and division and spite and slight, when you get into the what's fondly known as the Calvinism versus Arminianism debate, there is so much more heat than light in that.

I recently left the chess board where I've participated in conversation on wide ranging topics. It just got too pointless, ugly, and a lot of the smart people left. So I was looking for some other place that would be more edifying.

So I have joined the Baptist board and it's a good place. You don't have to be a Baptist. There's a couple of forums that are Baptist only for discussion, like they want to talk about what is it to be an independent Baptist and that's fine.

But they have the same problems as everyone, but to a much lesser degree. There are still immature people who want to win their point by insulting their correspondent, by belittling them. If someone differs from them theologically, they'll question their salvation.

How can you possibly have any influence of the Holy Spirit when you don't agree with me? There's ugliness and it's shameful. It shouldn't happen in a group of believers that

have gathered for fellowship around Christ and the Word of God. It's shameful.

But most of this board is, I mean, compared to the cesspool I just left, it's a welcome, bright, sunny meadow compared to coming out of the ghettos. However, they have one forum that is just a flash fire waiting to happen and it's the Calvinism versus Arminianism forum. And when you get in there, Katie barred the door, the gloves are off, it's bare knuckled, drag them to the death.

You can't have a civil discussion in there because people are what? So convinced that they're right. Seeing they see and do not perceive, hearing they hear and do not understand. They don't think that there's such a thing as free will on the Calvinist side.

Ultimately, we're all deserving of condemnation. God, for reasons of His own, has chosen to effectively move some people to accept Him and gives them the grace and He doesn't give it to others. It's His choice.

And that's the whole basis of the debate. But here's the thing. To understand this parable, and this is our second point.

What's the first point? Don't trust your magnetic compass. Just because it tells you you're right, doesn't mean you're right. If you're of any age at all, I know this has happened to you as it has happened to me.

You lash yourself to a mast. You get into an argument and you're defending it to the death. You bring out all the guns.

You are out to crush, kill and destroy all opposition. And then a fresh fact comes in and you find out, oops, in the light of this fact, I have just made a fool of myself and I've got egg all over my face because there's this one thing I didn't know. Well, how right did we feel right before we got that additional fact? The feeling of rightness is no guarantee that you're right.

That's our first point. The second point is this. To understand this parable, we need to understand what the elements of it represent.

This is true of all parables. So here's my question to you. Second pop quiz question of the morning, what does the seed represent? What does the seed represent? A lot of people come to this parable in this Calvin Arminian.

By the way, Arminians are not Arminians. If you go read what Jacob Arminius believed, nobody who's opposing Calvinism in the modern day believes what Arminius believed. And most Calvinists don't believe what Calvin does not qualify as Calvinist.

Calvinists have to throw John Calvin out because he was not a pointer by any stretch. And Arminius was fouled up as well. So the whole thing is mislabeled.

It's a silly argument to begin with. Don't go to one side or the other of that looking for any light. You're just going to get heat.

Go to the scriptures. If you've got questions about free will, predestination, election, and all the rest of it, go to the scriptures, ask, seek, and knock. It's not hard.

There's part of me that doesn't understand why it's so controversial. But here's the thing. Someone who is a Calvinist will say, you know, this soil is what it is.

It's just like the sheep and goats. A goat is a goat and he can't be a sheep by choice. He's born a goat.

He is a goat. He's destined to be a goat. And the goats are sent into the fire at the sheep and goat's judgment.

The sheep are born sheep. They're raised as sheep. Jesus recognizes them as sheep, sends them all into his father's kingdom.

They don't have any choice in the matter. That's just how it is. They don't have any choice in their fate.

The Lord decides their fate and that's where they go. So they come to this parable and say, well, the seed is the truth of God and primarily the gospel. What does Jesus say in, uh, after the central section, we're going to look at, he says in verse 19, when anyone hears what the word of the kingdom misunderstanding begins to creep in because people say the word of the kingdom is the gospel of salvation.

It's not the word of the kingdom is not the gospel of salvation. It's not going to fall on the hard soil by the wayside and the birds are not going to carry off the gospel and you can't be saved because you just happen to be hard packed soil. Your heart is hard.

The gospel hit it. It didn't penetrate. You're lost and you're going to hell.

That has nothing to do. That scenario is not envisioned anywhere in this parable. So let's start by decoding the elements of the parable.

A sower went forth to sow. What is he sowing? Write it down, burn it into your brain. It is the word of the kingdom.

Now, what is the word of the kingdom? What kingdom? What kingdom? Who is being approached here? What are the words that come out of John the Baptist's mouth at the beginning of this whole operation? This thing is conceived and kicked off and the first movement is John the Baptist. And what is he preaching to whom is he preaching and what is he saying? Repent for the kingdom is at hand. It's the kingdom from heaven.

It is the kingdom promised by God. What kingdom? It is the kingdom that has David's

throne ruling over it. To whom was it promised? Israel.

It includes components such as I will take out your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will pour out my spirit so that your old men and your young men and your sons and daughters will prophesy. Very great innovation there.

Daughters will prophesy. In a patriarchal society that was a shocker. People said, well, I'm content under the old part of the covenant here because that new part where daughters are prophesying sounds a little risque.

I'm not sure I want that. The kingdom introduced by John the Baptist and preached by Jesus and his disciples has a specific audience. Who is it? Israel.

Descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose ancestors made a covenant with God at Sinai, whose king David was promised a descendant, a son who would sit on the throne and rule over God's people, Israel. David was not promised to be king of the world. David was promised that he and his sons would rule Israel.

The gospel of the kingdom here is the good news to Israel about what we call the millennial kingdom. That's what the seed is. It is not the gospel of salvation.

A lot of people have a compass in their heart that makes them think this is talking about salvation and about election and about predestination and about the ultimate fate resting in God's hands rather than the challenge to individual choice. As right as they may feel, they are wrong. Jesus himself is interpreting his own parable.

I feel confident in siding with him and saying the seed in this parable is not salvation. It is a message being brought to people who are already saved about the fulfillment of promises God has made to them. What are they going to do with this message for believers, Old Testament saints? Jesus isn't scattering this seed outside the land of Israel.

What does he say when the lady comes and says, Lord, come help me? And she's from Syrophenicia. I am sent to whom? I am sent only to whom? The lost sheep of the house of Israel. I am only sent to them.

A sower went forth to sow. He's sowing the seed. What is the seed? Repent for the kingdom is at hand.

They say you're casting out demons by the prince of demons. And he says, no, if I'm casting out demons by the power of God, by the spirit of God, he says by the finger of God, then the kingdom has come upon you. Your kingdom, the kingdom promised to your ancestors in prophetic scripture.

That's the seed. Don't mistake it. Now, will this have application in other ways and in

other places? Yes, but in this parable and Jesus primary audience here is saved Israel.

These people are saved. Every type of soil is saved soil. Nobody hears an unbeliever.

The gospel of the kingdom doesn't come to unbelievers. It doesn't even go to Gentiles at this point. It goes to Israel.

So context, we want to be sure that our little internal rightness meter doesn't get fooled. Let no one deceive you. This is where we're starting.

And by getting our facts straight, what was the introduction that we saw last time? We're about to go to our break here. What is Jesus talking about as his mother and brothers are standing outside? Those who are interested in the will of my father, who are seeking to do the will of my father. They are the ones who have a priority.

Those are the ones that I will speak with. There's a big crowd here. And I am sure that he eventually spoke with his mother, honor your father and mother, that your days may be long.

His mother and brothers, I am sure were able to get in to talk to him. That's not recorded. What is the point? If you are seeking, you have the same priority in the Lord's mind as his own mother, the Virgin Mary, as the Catholics like to call her.

Uh, that's, that's a pretty strong priority. You have that priority. If you are seeking to do the will of the father, and that is often sacrificial, we have to sacrifice our pride.

We have to sacrifice our sense of, uh, you know, personal correctness. In many cases, we may have to make some changes. We may have to shift our associations and the way we invest our time, but there is no other person to be than related to the Lord Jesus, making him a priority so that he makes us a priority.

There is no other reason to be here for us. If we are the body of Christ, uh, there's nothing more tragic than looking at someone that has a wasting disease like ALS or Parkinson's where your body no longer conforms to your will. You get a tremor, you get a shake, you lose strength.

You tell your legs to move and they don't. You tell your hand to, to grasp and it can't. You want your eyes to see and they don't work.

You want your ears to hear and they don't work. You want your balance center inside your head to keep you upright and steady and not nauseous and not feel like the room is spinning, but it does it anyway. You're the body of Christ.

We are the body of Christ. When the body does not function in accordance with the will and what the instructions the head is sending out, what kind of body is it? How effective is that body going to be? Do you want to be the part of the body that does not work? Do

you want to be the ALS infected part, the Parkinson's infected part? Ask someone like Linda Ronstadt, who one of the greatest singers of her generation can't sing a note because of Parkinson's. She lost the ability to control her, her voice.

And it seems to be, you know, her gift and a reason for being. And her voice will not obey her mind. She can sing in her head, but she can't sing from her throat.

We're the body of Christ. And when this sower goes forth to sow what that seed is had better be sinking in deep. And it better be producing a 100 fold crop from us.

There's no excuse for anything less. We know better. Well, we're going to see the immediate application of this parable, this seed and these types of soil when we come back from the break.

And then we're going to see, as we do anytime we look at the old Testament people of God, whether it's in the old Testament or in the book of revelation, here's what pertains to them. I observe, I interpret, and I apply how does their example make a difference in how I should live, how I should think, how I can be a better reflector of the glory of God in my corner of the world. But we'll pause here and take our break.