

Matthew 20-12-13a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a snowy morning and we're going to continue our study this morning in the Gospel of Matthew, picking up in chapter 13 and coming to understand, at least I hope we come to understand, exactly what the Lord Jesus is talking about when he tells parables related to the Kingdom of Heaven. Our subject this morning is the Kingdom of Heaven.

What is it? Think, well, it's the Kingdom of Heaven. It seems pretty self-explanatory, but to understand the parables that relate to the Kingdom of Heaven, we need to know exactly what it is and what it is not. And misunderstanding this truth is what has resulted in a lot of misapplication, a lot of deception, a lot of fruitless behavior, and a lot of careless use of Scripture to support ideas that are not found there, once we understand what exactly it is.

Thankfully, the Gospel of Matthew has told us exactly what the Kingdom of Heaven is. So we're going to review that this morning. And as an inevitable consequence of that, we're also going to be doing a little bit of a Christmas study.

We're going to touch on the birth of Christ and we'll see that as we get started. But you can find your place in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 13. We're going to have to move out with alacrity.

So we'll ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study and we'll get started. Father, what a privilege it is to have a copy of Your Word that belongs to us, that we can have and hold, read whenever we like, study at will. We have the freedom, we have the privacy, we have the opportunity.

And we're grateful as so many in history past did not enjoy those wonderful privileges. We know that You have given us this potential for a purpose. We live in a time where we need the fulsome teaching of Your Word and an understanding of it so that we can redeem the time, live our lives in a worthy manner and prepare ourselves for the soon return of the Lord Jesus and the coming kingdoms to which He will take us.

We pray that as we look at Your Word this morning, God, the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, illuminate the truth, help us to understand it and see its pertinence and its application for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the subject, the question is, what is the kingdom of heaven? If I said, all right, close your books, get a little piece of paper and write K-O-H colon, and then your definition of what the kingdom of heaven is. What is it? The reason I ask this question is as we come to Matthew chapter 13, and Jesus is going to deliver the parable of the sower and the seed, which we've already seen. And when we get to verse 19, He says, when anyone

hears the word of the kingdom, what is the word of the kingdom? Well, we don't know what the word of the kingdom is, if we don't know what the kingdom is, right? The word is going to be about the kingdom.

And later on in verse 24, He is going to tell another parable. This is the second parable in our chapter, the parable of the wheat and the tares, very well known. I'm sure you could probably repeat the details of this without too much trouble, but it begins in verse 24.

The kingdom of heaven is like, so it's important to nail down exactly what the kingdom is, because this is what these parables are about. And we want to rightly divide the word of truth. We want to rightly apply this truth to ourselves and to the future, which will soon be upon us.

So let's begin at the And we're going to ascertain now before you think, Oh boy, here it is the Christmas season. And we're going to have this dry study of what the kingdom of heaven is. I will tell you right now, it's not dry and it is really important.

We have to figure this out. Let me just tell you this. You're not going to the kingdom of heaven.

I can tell you from scripture. You're not, it's not your kingdom. It's not my kingdom.

It's not our kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is not our kingdom. So if that doesn't spark your interest, I don't know how else to help you.

You're woods wet or something, but let's begin. Let's go back to Matthew chapter one, verse one, Matthew chapter one, verse one. In my Bible, it is labeled the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

There's the beginning of our answer right there. How does Matthew present Jesus? What is the thrust, the emphasis and the focus of his gospel? The facet he presents of Jesus Christ. It's right here in the very first verse.

Who does he say Jesus is? Son of David, son of Abraham. What does son of David make him? It starts with a K and ends with Ng. Son of David makes him king.

What was David king of? King of Israel, right? Where does Israel come from? How are they defined? Son of Abraham. The children of Abraham are what was called in Jesus day, ha-Judai-on, the Jews. That's what they were called in Greek.

B'nai Yisrael, the sons of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So son of David, son of Abraham, tells us that Jesus is a king and what he is the king of. We associate in our minds, I don't have to belabor this point.

If you have a king, he should have a kingdom. If there is a kingdom, there should be a

king of it, right? So this is our first clue. Jesus is king of the Jews.

And what is he going to do in verse 21 of that chapter? There is a message that is brought to Joseph and in a dream, the Lord appears to him. And just in case you ever wonder who the Lord is, when the Lord appears and it says the Lord spoke or the Lord appeared, this would be passing strange if the Lord in Old Testament days, which these are, was the pre-incarnate Christ. This would be Jesus coming to his father, announcing his own birth, right? So if the Lord appears to him, I'm thinking this is not the Lord Jesus.

There are people who think it is, but it's pretty, pretty unusual to come to your own father, your human father and announce that you're about to be born. But the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, Joseph, son of David, why son of David? This is the legal route. Joseph is Jesus' legal father, son of David.

Once again, qualification, Jesus is qualified as a son of David through both of his human lines, his earthly, what you might call adoptive father and his mother. Joseph, son of David. I don't think Joseph heard this phrase many times in his life.

There were many people that had been descended from David, but this is significant. Verse 21, marry your wife. Don't be afraid to take her.

That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bring forth a son and you shall call his name Yeshua. I think Yeshua is a much more beautiful name than our anglicized Jesus, which has always seemed a bit harsh to me with its double hard S's and so on.

But you will call his name Jesus, Yeshua actually, which comes from the verb that means to deliver. He will deliver his people from their sins. Call his name Yeshua.

He will deliver his people from their sins. Who are his people? Remember when we looked at Daniel 9 and Gabriel comes to him and says 70 weeks are determined upon your people, upon the holy city, fulfill righteousness and so on. Remember that in Daniel 9, 26, 27, along in there.

Who are Daniel's people? I have no difficulty with that question. They're Israel. They're the Jews, right? 70 weeks are determined upon your people.

If Jesus is going to save his people at this point in time, who are his people? Joseph, son of David. Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham. The chapter has told us who those people specifically are.

His name is Yeshua because he will save Israel from their sins. That's his people. There's no other way to take it.

Church isn't a gleam in a prophet's eye at this point. That's verse 21. You go to chapter

two, and at this season of the year, we're well familiar and we'll have another reminder today that there are wise men from the east who are going to come to prostrate themselves before the child.

Look at chapter two, verse one and two. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, where is he who has been born king of the Jews? King of the Jews. You know this, but we need to really think about this and keep it in mind.

Where is he that is born king of the Jews? By the way, it's even more emphatic in Greek. In the days of Herod the Basileos, where is he that is born Basileos of the Judean? In the days of king Herod, where is he that is born king of the Jews? Herod thinks he's the king of the Jews and there hasn't been a birth in his household. So naturally you have a startling development, but king of the Jews.

Look at verse six, when they said he'll be born in Bethlehem, this is what was written by the prophet, but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are not least among the rulers of Judah for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd whom? My people Israel. Only Israel is in view from one, one to and through this verse, right? He will govern Israel. Go to the next chapter, chapter three.

In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, repent, here's our phrase for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. But in verse one, where is John making this proclamation? Wilderness of Judea, Judea, Judea. They're much closer.

When you look at them in Greek, Jews is Judea. Judea is Judea in the wilderness of the Jews. You could almost translate this.

It's the wilderness of Judea. It belongs to the Judea, the Jews. So this is to whom the message of the kingdom of heaven is being preached by John.

And what does he say? He was baptizing people in the Jordan. When he saw the Pharisees, he says, brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come in verse eight, bear fruits worthy of repentance. He is preaching saying, change your mind.

Metanoeo in the imperative, change your mind. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is near.

It's at the threshold. It is at the door. Repent and bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Bear fruits worthy of in keeping with repentance. So because the kingdom is near, the Jews need to change their minds. Fair? We're good so far.

When you look at verse 10, even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore,

every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. This is one of the places that your reformed theologians and Calvinists get the idea that if you're a true believer, you will persevere.

The P in tulip, perseverance of the saints, genuine believers will bear fruit in keeping with repentance. If there is no fruit, there is no repentance. This is one of the places they get it.

Because if you think about this, John is not down there saying there is a savior coming who is going to deliver you from the lake of fire, right? His message is the kingdom is at hand and somebody can say, well, maybe I don't, I'm not concerned about the kingdom of heaven. I'm happy with things the way they are. Have they rejected Christ? Have they rebelled against God? Are they an atheist? Are they an antichrist? This is a message about a coming kingdom.

It is a kingdom for the Jews and they need to change their minds to be qualified for it. And if they do change their minds and if they are interested in that kingdom, they should bear fruits in keeping with that change of mind. What is the change of mind about? What is the issue about which they need to change their mind? Are you living in the current kingdom or do you want to live in the kingdom of heaven? Are you happy where you are or do you want to change kingdoms away from the kingdom that Herod is king of, away from the ruler of this world and the principalities and powers that Paul will talk about later.

But they have a king. It's the kingdom that Herod rules over. But there is a kingdom from heaven, a kingdom of heaven.

And I want you to consider, if I can suggest this, that salvation is not the issue. What is the issue in salvation? What think ye of Christ? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you are saved.

Right? Here, the message is the kingdom is at hand. Think about the Jews who hear this message. Are they suddenly convicted that if they don't move into this kingdom, they are going to be destroyed in an eternal burning lake of fire? What are they supposed to change their mind about? That's the question.

We're looking for that because this tells us what the kingdom of heaven is. In other words, in a nutshell, is the kingdom of heaven a synonym for salvation or is it something else? And I will submit to you as you look at these verses through Matthew, chapter one through chapter 13, you can't use kingdom of heaven as a synonym for salvation. Bear fruits in keeping with change of mind.

This is a turning point in our understanding here. Up to this point, you could say, well,

maybe it's salvation that begins with the house of Israel and then extends to all people. I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people for unto you is born this day, a savior who is Christ the Lord.

But that's not the message we've gotten in Matthew thus far, is it? A little view of the outside world there. So look at verse 12. The one who is coming after me, John says, is mightier than I. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. This is a specific reference to the Lord Jesus. His winnowing fan is in his hand.

He will thoroughly clean out what? His threshing floor. His threshing floor. He is going to gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

So the coming one has a threshing floor and what's on the floor? His wheat. It's not somebody else's wheat. It's not tares.

It's not anything other than wheat that belongs to him. He probably grew it. He could have possibly purchased it, but typically you grow your own wheat and then you thresh it because people don't want unhusked wheat, you know, raw wheat for sale.

They want you to have done some of the processing. So this is his wheat and it's on his threshing floor and it belongs to him to do with as he wills. Notice also that before it is threshed, what can you say about the wheat and the chaff? Is this wheat seeds and tares? Is this wheat and oats? Is it wheat and barley? Is it two mixed grains from different plants and different sources? How do you get chaff separated from wheat? Initially, they're the same thing.

Suggesting again, this wheat is the house of Israel. They're all children of Abraham. They are all belonging to the one who is born King of the Jews, Son of David.

This wheat, grain and chaff belongs to him. It's his. And it's unlike any other grain, any other weed, thorns, briars, anything else you want to name.

And it is united initially. It has to be separated, but it starts out united. Are believers and unbelievers? You could say, well, there are believers and unbelievers in the salvation sense in Israel, but it's suggestive, right? Wheat and chaff.

As you get to chapter four, Satan is going to tempt the Lord Jesus. And when he returns in verse 17, when Jesus hears in verse 12 that John's been put in prison, Jesus goes to Galilee. He leaves Nazareth.

He comes and dwells in Capernaum by the sea. And there's a prophecy that is fulfilled. And from that time, verse 17, Jesus began to preach and to say what? Very same thing John said, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Change your mind, not because the Savior is here, not because you were lost in sin and dead in trespasses. The kingdom is near. The kingdom is here.

The kingdom is at hand. Change your mind. The kingdom is the issue.

Now, does he present the kingdom in salvation terms? You've got to enter the kingdom or you're going to the lake of fire. Well, as we move forward, turn to verse 23 to see what Jesus is preaching. Chapter four, verse 23, Jesus went about all Galilee.

This is what the prophecy was about up in verses 15 and 16. Beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, people who sat in darkness have seen a great light upon those who sat in a region and shadow of death, a light has dawned. Jesus went about verse 23, all Galilee teaching where? In their synagogues.

Not in the streets, not on the hillsides yet. Where is he going first with this message of the kingdom? He goes to the churches basically. If you were going to launch a great evangelistic ministry today, I mean, you might actually sadly need to go to churches, but typically we assume believers go to church and unbelievers are out playing golf and watching ballgames and doing whatever people do in these times when they can't get together in large groups.

But you figure, well, the Christians are in church when church meets and those that need to be saved and evangelized are out somewhere else. Jesus is preaching and teaching in the synagogues. Who does he expect to be in the synagogues? People that believe in God and want to hear the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures.

So he is preaching in their synagogues, preaching what? The gospel of the kingdom. Change your mind. The kingdom is at hand.

He doesn't say the king, you need to put personal faith in me. He says, you need to pay attention to the promises of the father related to the kingdom. If someone does change their mind because the kingdom is at hand, is he presenting himself as the king at this point? He's preaching the same message as John the Baptist.

John says, change your mind. The kingdom is at hand. Jesus says, change your mind.

The kingdom is at hand. So this is change of mind, not about the person of Christ. This is my point.

Through these first four chapters, Jesus is not making an issue of himself, he is making an issue of the kingdom as John the Baptist did before him. And it is the message of the kingdom. This is the good news, the gospel of the kingdom.

Not the king, not the savior, not deliverance from sin and death. It's the kingdom. You get to chapter five, when Jesus sees the multitudes and he climbs the hill, and this is the

teaching on the hill that we spent so much time on.

You get to verse three, blessed are the poor in spirit, why? Theirs is the kingdom. Now, poverty of spirit, which we would call humility, is this what scripture tells us is required for salvation? Be humble and go to heaven. Be humble and not stand at the great white throne judgment and be cast into the lake of fire.

Blessed are the humble, the poor in spirit, those who recognize that they have spiritual need because they possess the kingdom of heaven. They will be owners. They will be propertied.

This is a quality and an attitude. It is not an expression of faith in a personal savior by any stretch. Well, I suppose, I probably underestimate how far people can stretch.

It's beyond any stretch I can make. I see no scripture anywhere that says, well, if your spirit is poor enough, you're saved. You could bend this around and say, well, you've got to recognize that your spirit is insufficient, that you're lost in trespasses and sins.

That's not what Jesus says here. It's not in the context. It's not a part of the message.

He says, those who are humble of spirit, who are poor in spirit, own the kingdom of heaven. Remember the rest of these things and you come back around full circle in verse 10, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They are possessors, landowners.

They are propertied, persecuted for righteousness sake. Are you not saved unless somebody makes life hard for you? Is this a salvation claim? Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness because only believers events enough righteousness to be persecuted for. And you must be persecuted.

You will be persecuted. You must be poor in spirit. Otherwise you're really not saved.

That's really the only other way to understand these verses, isn't it? Is that these are implications. These are allusions to salvation without clearly stating it. Look at verses 19 and 20.

Whosoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and these commandments are the law that he mentioned in verse 18, one yode and one tittle will not pass away from the law. I've not come to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

So the old Testament scriptures is what Jesus is talking about. What are the old Testament scriptures require? What do the law and the prophets address? To whom are they addressed? This is the covenant God made with Israel beginning at Sinai, right? This is a call to faith and obedience. These are the things you do to be obedient, to be

righteous, not to be saved.

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, if you fail any of the requirements of the law of Moses or the call of the prophets to return to God and eschew evil and put away from you idolatry and the practices of the Gentiles around you, if you fail and teach other men so, that individual will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven, called least and called great in the kingdom based on faithfulness and obedience. And exhorting others to be faithful and obedient determines place in the kingdom of heaven.

That's 5, 19 and 20. Take a look at chapter 6, verse 33. Jesus talks about no one being able to serve two masters.

Don't worry about your life. Solomon in all of his glory was not arrayed like the lilies of the field. So don't worry about what you eat, drink or wear.

These are what the Gentiles seek. Verse 32, your heavenly father knows that you need all these things. If these people have God as their father, what kind of people are they? Saved or lost in our parlance? Your father knows.

And they've been sitting now through two full chapters of teaching on the hill that isn't get saved. Then in verse 33, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all of these things shall be added to you. So for people who already have God as their father, Jesus says you need to seek the kingdom.

You've got to seek the kingdom. You're not already in it because God is your father. If God's your father, you're born again, right? We are sons of God through adoption, by regeneration and so on.

So in the later language of the New Testament, these people are being addressed as believers and are told to seek the kingdom. So to answer our question, is the kingdom a synonym for salvation? If you're told after salvation that you have to seek it, then it can't be an exact synonym for salvation. It certainly is going to involve saved people.

If you're not saved, I think you're not going to see the kingdom, right? But salvation doesn't automatically translate to the kingdom. People who teach the law would only be teaching it. People who break the law would only be breaking it because they're aware of it.

They believe in God, but they've misunderstood his law. They haven't figured out how to obey it. They're going to be leased in the kingdom, but they're concerned with the law.

They're concerned with the covenant that they have with God. Turn over one more page. We're about to go to our break.

But chapter 7 verse 19, you remember we've already seen in chapter 3 verse 10, the axe is laid at the root of the trees, every tree that bears good fruit. Maybe we should turn back there because we're going to see this tree again in Matthew 7. Turn back to Matthew 3 and just notice in verse 10, John says, the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

When you cut a tree down and throw it into the fire, what happens? You don't get good wood that you're going to build things out of. It is turned to ashes and it is no longer a tree. It's unrecognizable.

It's destroyed. Every tree does not bear good fruit. So once again, you have this conundrum I alluded to earlier.

Either salvation and fruit are inextricably linked and you can't be saved without bearing good fruit, or this is not talking about salvation. The tree here is the tree that God expects fruit from. And the cutting down of the tree is not loss of salvation and the burning of the tree is not destruction in the lake of fire.

This is talking about the fruit of the life. Are you reflecting God's glory? Are you faithful? Are you obedient? If you are not, everything that your life was invested in is going to vanish. But this is the fruit of the life.

The tree does not represent the person. The tree represents whether or not there is productivity. So for now, we'll leave it as an open question.

We could, without any justification in the context or in the teaching of Jesus, we could say, if there's no fruit, you're not saved. Therefore, you're cut down and thrown into the fire because if you were saved, you would automatically have good fruit. So we'll hold that thought.

But just circle tree there in 310. Every tree that does not bear good fruit. This is a theme to which Jesus returns when we get to chapter 7 and verse 19.

Beware of false prophets. You will know them by their fruits. Verse 16, false prophets will be known by their fruits.

Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit. A bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Exact reiteration of what he said back in chapter 3. This is 719. Therefore, by their fruits, you will know them.

Now, what is he talking about in this context? How will you know if someone is a false

prophet? By their fruits. How do you know if someone is a false news source? How do you know if someone is twisting information in media today? What is the fruit of it? Does it return us to God country in the Bible, or does it spawn fear, dependence, loss of freedom, suspicion, division, conflict, bitterness, hatred, vindictiveness, implacability? All the people that supported this person need to be listed, rounded up, and punished. Well, whatever source is promulgating that, that's a bad tree with bad fruit, right? So, we're going to pause here and take our break, but as we have come almost, we're within five chapters of our passage now, the kingdom of heaven that is being preached, A, is something that is ruled by Jesus as king of the Jews and is therefore limited to the Jews, children of Abraham.

B, it is something that is acquired, sought, and possessed by works. You seek it by works, you possess it by works, by enduring persecution, by remaining humble, by being obedient, by not teaching falsehood and leading people astray, but by teaching the Old Testament law and prophets and abiding by them. This obedience makes you great in the kingdom, and those who are not interested in the kingdom are bad trees bearing bad fruit.

They will be cut down and those trees will be burned. This is what we know so far. By way of application in this first session, we go to the Old Testament, we go to Israel, we observe, we interpret, and we apply.

I'm going to suggest that this kingdom is not our kingdom. This is not our target. It's not our destination, but what God says to Israel about their kingdom is pertinent and applicable to us about our kingdom.

We should seek our kingdom. We should be faithful and obedient to the word that has been delivered to us. We too should be humble, i.e. teachable, and bear fruit in keeping with our change of mind toward the kingdom that God has promised us rather than any prosperity or goals or possessions in this world.

So we have these points of contact and a similar outlook without it being the same kingdom in the same way that we have New Testament scriptures that are different than the Old Testament scriptures, but our need for faith and obedience is the same. Israel had the Lord Jesus in a role as their national king as well as their savior. We have him in the role as the head of all things to the body, and he is our savior.

Israel and the church, same savior, but is he king for the church? Is he the head of the body for Israel? Those roles are different, but the need for faith and obedience is the same. So as we think about where is he that is born king of the Jews at this season, we can translate that to where is he that came to be my savior and my authority, my spiritual deliverance, my spiritual identity, the one who will come to me and dwell with me if I have his words and keep them. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we return, we're going to see the rest of what Matthew has to say between chapter 7 and chapter 13, and that will help us when we look at the parable of the wheat and the tares. Who or what is the wheat? Who or what are the tares? This is very important for us to make pertinent observation, interpretation, and application. So we'll see that when we return.