

Matthew 21-01-03a

We're going to continue our study now that we're into the new year of 2021, this being January the 3rd. Our study in the Gospel of Matthew, we're picking up in chapter 13, we're looking at the seed parables that Jesus presents there and their exploration and communication regarding the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. Those are close to being synonyms.

They're not exactly the same. I'll tell you my thoughts on what the difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God is. They are the same kingdom, but emphasizing a different perspective in each.

And there's a reason why those terms are used when and where they are. But we're going to pick that study up now after our December hiatus. So let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll get started.

Father, we're grateful for your cleansing grace. We're grateful for your provision for us, your protection of us, your weaving our lives into your plan and purpose so that we have meaning and purpose in our daily existence. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word this morning together, that the Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts in a way that is meaningful and applicable, that we'll see not only the truth about the kingdom aspect as presented in your word, but we'll see what our relationship is to it and for it.

And that as a result, we can invest the time that remains to us in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifies our Savior. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you've not already done so, you can turn to the book of Matthew chapter 13. We'll quickly read ourselves back into the picture here. One of the things that I would like to say by way of introduction is that there is a lot of talk about kingdom today.

If I had a nickel for every time I've heard King Jesus or kingdom work and so on, I could get myself a nice dinner. So it's important, I think, for us to understand what is the biblical view, not just what is the modern Christian view of the kingdom and the kingship of the Lord Jesus. As does it pertain now? Does it pertain later? Is the kingdom now? Is the kingdom later? Is it already not yet? That's another phrase I've heard ever since seminary.

And it's well-intentioned. I think it's misleading. And it's more clear to talk about the difference between positional truth and experiential truth.

When you say my salvation is already not yet, the kingship of Jesus is already not yet, it kind of largely, for me at least, loses any applicational value. If I'm going to mow the yard, am I going to mow it already not yet as I sit here? I'm going to get some firewood

this afternoon. Is that an already not yet? I mean, it's better to think in terms of do you have a plan? Do you have an intention? Is there something on the schedule? Is there support and logistics to bring it into being? When is it going to take place? It can be a confirmed reality in the future that affects what we do today.

But I just think there's a lot of fuzzy thinking and a lot of inattention to the details of the Word of God that have led to widespread misapplication of what the Bible says about the Lord Jesus as King, what He is King of, when He is King, and what that means to the people of God both now and in the future. So we're going to try to straighten that out. But my goal here, because as I have surveyed over these past few weeks this Kingdom teaching as it currently prevails and as you hear it presented, one of the things that strikes me is the importance of answering the question, so what? And as I listen to people present their notions about King Jesus and Kingdom work and so on, I keep looking for, okay, what is the application? You can talk at length about society and culture and social issues and Kingdom this and King that.

But at the end of the day, when you and I close our Bibles today, having had a wonderful time in the Word of God and a great time of fellowship together, what will we see this morning related to the Kingdom as it is presented in chapter 13 that makes a difference in how we think, how we sort our goals and our values and our priorities, and will it make a difference in the way we invest our time? Time is a stewardship. We are still here because God is giving the resource. It's like the parable of the talents.

Every hour, every waking moment of the day is capital. We can fritter it away, we can waste it, or we can invest it. Even relaxation and taking a break and resting and refreshment is an investment, but it needs to be intentionally invested, not accidentally spilled, lost, wasted.

This is why so many metal detectors are sold. People are hoping to find coins that people dropped and lost in the past, and the bigger and more valuable, the better. Well, I would love to find somebody's gold doubloon that got dropped when some Spanish explorer traipsed over our hill, but what I really don't want to do is take the gold that God has allocated to me by way of time and opportunity and drop that into the dirt to be unused, uninvested, unleveraged in the way that you see in that parable of the talents.

So ultimately, be watching this morning and hold me to the standard that we should all be holding everyone to, which is, so what? What difference does this make? If we're not looking at the Word of God and if it is not changing us, if it's not motivating us, if it isn't something the Holy Spirit can use to draw us closer to Christ, to make us better disciples, better representatives, better able to be the body of Christ and represent Christ both to each other and to the world, we're wasting our time. Might as well turn on a ballgame. So that's what we're watching for.

What difference does it make? Let's begin by reviewing our passage. It's been a couple

of weeks since we read it. Because the parable of the sower is so familiar, I'm going to start after Jesus presents that parable and before He gives the explanation.

The explanation is a great review of the parable itself. But you remember that this is communicated on purpose in this symmetrical fashion. So just pretend like I have and we have looked at the parable of the sower.

And so in verse 10 of Matthew 13, the disciples came and said, why do you speak to them in parables? And He answers, because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. We talked last time about this idea of it being given. And in the Reformed tradition, in Calvinist theology, this is part of a package of things that are given that includes your saving faith and a lot of other things.

I don't have time to go back and refute all of that. I will just say that God gives to people for a reason. It's not inscrutable.

It's not random. It's not known only to God. It's not those that He foreloved in the past.

And I'm unworthy, but God loved me. You're unworthy, but God didn't love you. And so He gave me saving faith and He didn't give it to you.

That's the Calvinist view of salvation in a nutshell. And it's unbiblical. I think people are striving to be biblical, both in their respect for God's sovereignty, God's grace and so on.

But it reminds me of what Paul said in Romans about the Israelites. They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. And it isn't enough to be zealous.

It isn't enough to want to honor God and to want to keep people from reducing His glory in some way. And well, if you elevate man, you reduce God. And as soon as you say man can make a choice, you're diminishing God and diminishing His grace and dimming His glory.

Well, I will just say hogwash. No man can diminish God's glory in the first place. God's got His glory well in hand.

God can take care of His own glory. Thank you very much. And that's a distraction because it's an ad hominem response.

There's something wrong with you because you think that man has been created with the ability to choose and that that choice for God does not create merit or something that is deserved. It's making a choice. Come up to the salad bar.

You can choose spinach or iceberg for your basic leaf. There's no credit for which leaf you chose. It's just a choice.

Everybody chooses. You choose what socks to put on. You choose what shoes to put on.

You choose what to have for breakfast. You choose how much coffee to drink. You choose all day long.

And you can say, well, that was a good healthy choice or that was a detrimental and unhealthy choice. But the choosing itself doesn't have the merit. The merit is in what you chose.

There's no merit in faith. The merit of faith is in its object. If I choose to trust Christ, the only reason that trusting is quote unquote good is because the object of it is good.

The faith itself doesn't carry with it any merit. If my chair catches fire and I choose to stand up and leave that chair, have I made a meritorious choice? Do I deserve something because I preserved myself from destruction? Choosing Christ, recognizing that the alternative is judgment can be viewed and I have been accused of being just self-serving in my choice. If it's a self-serving choice, how is it meritorious? I'm preserving myself from eternal destruction.

Why should I get brownie points for that? Who wouldn't in their right mind choose to preserve themselves from eternal destruction? Well, someone who doesn't like the alternative, which is eternity in God's realm, under God's authority, in God's plan, God's way, on God's terms. And there are people who would rather, and angels, who would rather be eternally destroyed than live eternally with God on his terms. They want things on their own terms.

But the choice has no merit. And those who say that faith is a work are flying in the face of Ephesians 2, 8, 9, and a host of other passages. If God says faith is not a work, I'll take his word over a Calvinist.

Calvinists say the unregenerate man cannot express faith because he's contributing. A guy told me, well, you believe in let's make a deal salvation. The man is going to come and offer himself to God and God's going to offer him salvation.

And it's a deal. And let's make a deal salvation. Not at all.

Choice is non-meritorious. Faith is non-meritorious. The merit of faith is in the object.

And the choice is simply where do I want to spend eternity? Do I want to be destroyed? Or would I like to spend eternity with God on God's terms? And that's the kicker. Satan and a third of the angels do not want to spend any more of eternity with God on God's terms. Unbelievers in this life brook and rebel at the notion that coming to God, coming to Christ has to be done on God's terms, God's way, with God's righteousness, God's plan, God's purpose.

And that we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God with the promise that he will exalt us in due time. Following the example of the Lord Jesus in Philippians chapter two, who humbled himself and became obedient. That's the model.

Faith, claiming Jesus Christ as our Savior by faith, making that choice requires humility. It requires a recognition that I cannot save myself. I am not good.

My standards of right and wrong and my ability to meet them are insufficient and inadequate. I am sinful. I am corrupt.

I am fallen. I am like a cancer creating and metastasizing evil and sin wherever I go. I need a Savior.

I cannot save myself. So I've said many times when you go to the big book for Alcoholics Anonymous, which has been adopted, the philosophy and the methodology have been adopted by many addiction recovery programs. The first step is recognizing that I have a problem and I cannot fix it myself.

This is why when people go to an AA meeting, the first thing they do is they stand up and they say, Hi there, I'm Sam Hall and I'm an alcoholic. I'm not an alcoholic, but if I were and I went to an AA meeting, that's what I would say. And any addiction, any irredeemable problem, any unsolvable problem that we have has to begin by recognizing our inability and our need to go outside ourselves.

And ultimately, and most importantly, that happens at salvation. So when Jesus says to you, it has been given to understand, to those it has not, the specific content here is the mysteries of the kingdom. Why has it been given to them? If you are of the belief that, well, Jesus was walking by the seaside, saw some fishermen, said, follow me.

They robotically dropped their nets and followed him with no forethought, no real decision on their part. It was an effectual call. That's good Calvinism, but it's bad scripture.

It's bad Bible interpretation. What do we know about the disciples? What had happened previous to the day that Jesus walked by the seashore and talked to his companions, Peter and Andrew and James and John with whom he had spent many weeks? Where did he first meet them? Baptism of John. Why were they there? Because they were already interested like Simeon and Anna and many other people who were waiting for the coming of God's deliverance to Israel.

They were proactively, they had left their businesses in Galilee and come down to the Jordan and were listening to John the Baptist. That was a choice. It's not a meritorious choice.

If you're an Israelite and part of the people of God, you ought to be. If you're part of the

people of God beholden to him and in covenant relationship with him, why would you not be seeking his plan? And a point of application now is before we even talk about kingdom or citizenship or any of the rest of it, the reason you're here listening to the teaching of the word of God right now is you have an interest. You know who you are.

You know why you're here. You have made it a priority to find out what God wants by way of faith and obedience. And you're here.

So by the end of our fellowship this morning, if we understand some new things, that's understanding that has been given to us, right? We have been given an understanding. It comes through the word of God. It comes through the Holy Spirit.

It comes through an intermediate agency of somebody compiling it, organizing it and presenting it. But to you, it has been given to understand the seed parables of Matthew 13, right? Why was it given to you? I didn't chase you down on the highway and run you off on the shoulder and open your car door and shout Matthew 13 into your ear. You came.

You're interested. You know that we all need this information to live our lives in a way that pleases God. So my whole point here, there is a reason why God gives.

To him who has, more will be given. To him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. People learn some truth.

They go to church for a while and then they quit and they're not interested anymore. That understanding fades. That perspective, that influence fades away, right? Even what they have is taken away.

To him who has, more will be given. It has been given to you. They have abandoned all and followed Christ.

They've been doing this for months. As a result, not because that's a meritorious decision, but because they have made that decision, more is given. Whoever has, to him more will be given, verse 12, and you will have abundance.

We have a Bible. We can attend Bible class. We can look into our Bibles.

We can think about what is communicated there. And there's grist for the mill all week long. We have abundance.

There's additional insight and perspective and truth that is spoken in love by our fellow believers. We converse together, husband and wife, parents and children, individuals within our church, whether scattered or co-located. We fellowship in the word and we have an abundance.

It's such a wonderful thing to have fellowship in the word, to have these truths given to

us, and to have enough that you can carry it around with you. You've got to drive somewhere, just reflect. I wonder what other scriptures I can think of, what other examples, what things we've learned in the past that tie into that, and what the application is, given that this is true, how should we then live? You will have abundance.

Whoever does not have even what he has will be taken away from him. No accident that that is put in the middle of the seed parable. The parable is presented.

This is at the center of the chiasm, if you will. It's the most important thing. We have to understand why insight is given.

It's got a purpose. So I speak to them in parables because they don't see. Parables make sense to people who have already built a foundation.

If I'm giving you furnishings for the second floor, you better have already poured the foundation, built the first floor, built the second floor, enclosed the thing, put a roof over it, you've got a house that is ready to be furnished. I can't give you furniture when you didn't bother to build a house. Where are you going to put it? So therefore, verse 18, hear the parable of the sower.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, this is why we are stopping to make sure we understand what the kingdom is. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

The single biggest misapprehension about the parable of the sower and the seed is that the seed is the gospel of salvation. Why would someone think that? Because they misunderstand what the word of the kingdom is. The kingdom is thought by some to be salvation.

If you're in the kingdom, you're saved. If you're outside the kingdom, you're not saved. So the word of the kingdom is the gospel.

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. Someone asked me a week or two back if the burial of Christ was a part of the gospel and Paul says it is and that he was buried and that he was raised. Romans 10, 9 and 10.

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, that's salvation with the heart and with the mouth and public verbal confession. Some people think well I've got to tell somebody that I believed or I'm not saved because it says if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead and this is why many denominations have an altar call that when they have an invitation they say come down to the front, make a public profession of your faith based on Romans 10, 9 and 10. We'll address that at some

point but we're not talking about salvation this morning.

We're talking about the kingdom and they're not the same thing and I can prove it. You can prove it and we're going to see what the kingdom is this morning in detail from the word of God and confirm for ourselves that conflating those two things is a great misunderstanding. So when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.

This is he who received seed by the wayside. This is the paths that run along the edge of and in some cases through the field and the benefit of understanding that this is not the gospel is if you believe that this is the information necessary for salvation that the word of the kingdom is Christ died for our sins and that he was buried and that he was raised again the third day according to the scriptures and it says someone does not understand. It doesn't say they do not accept.

It doesn't say they do not believe. It doesn't say they don't embrace and publicly profess and confess. What does it say? It says they don't understand.

Now this is a serious thing. Can you be lost because the presentation of the gospel was not understandable enough and before you could figure it out Satan came and snatched away the gospel. That's what people believe if they believe that the word of the kingdom is the gospel of salvation.

You have to believe that people can be lost just because the gospel wasn't made clear enough. Notice the verb here. Jesus chooses every word for a reason.

They do not understand it. Now do you see why I belabored the part in the middle about to whom it has been given and why it is given? Why is it someone would not understand? Is it just an accident? Why would someone not understand the word of the kingdom? Except for the sake of argument that the word of the kingdom is what John the Baptist preached and what Jesus preached at the beginning of his ministry. What is the word of the kingdom that John the Baptist preached? It's one sentence.

Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Change your mind. The kingdom is imminent.

Now think about this. How understandable is that message? What are the two things that need to be understood to make sense out of that declaration and that exhortation? It's an exhortation followed by a declaration, right? Change your mind. In Greek, change your mind.

That's the exhortation. Somebody says, okay, that's not hard to understand. I need to change my mind about something.

And then there's a declaration. The reason you need to change your mind is the

kingdom, God's kingdom is at hand. So what is this kingdom? Repent or you're going to the lake of fire.

Repent. If you want to go to heaven, what's the declaration here? Repent for the kingdom is at hand to understand that message. What do you have to understand? Everybody understands what changing your mind is.

What part do you have to understand? It's the part we need to understand, which is what is the kingdom. Now in Jesus day, in John the Baptist day, when this message goes forth, the kingdom is imminent. You need to be ready.

That's the message of Elijah slash John the Baptist is prepare the way of the Lord. Make his path straight. Mountains need to be reduced.

Valleys need to be filled in. Prepare the way for the king and the kingdom, right? So for someone to understand the word of the kingdom, which is what Jesus is talking about here, what would they have to understand? What is the kingdom and what is the promise of the kingdom, right? They would have to know their old Testament scripture. They would have to know that they are the people of God, that they are in a covenant relationship with God and that God has made promises about this kingdom, right? So previous interest, previous choice, previous pursuit of understanding the plan and purpose of God is required to understand the word of the kingdom, right? If you have not bothered to listen in synagogue, if you have not bothered to peruse the law of Moses and the prophets in particular, who talk about this kingdom, Ezekiel has got chapters on this kingdom.

Isaiah has got chapters on this kingdom. There are calls to change of mind, to humble yourselves, to put away bad practice, to return to God and to his call to faith and obedience. That's old Testament.

If you are steeped in that, if you have paid attention to that, if you were interested enough to understand the preceding material, what's going to happen when you hear John the Baptist and Jesus and his disciples proclaiming that the kingdom is at hand? Would you then be able to understand it? You would. Simeon understood it. Anna understood it.

Joseph of Arimathea understood it. Nicodemus understood it. Many of the Pharisees understood it and believed.

Many of the people understood it and believed. People swarmed out to the Jordan to be baptized because they understood what John was saying. And it's the word of the kingdom.

It is not the gospel of salvation from the lake of fire and eternal life in the future kingdom of the father with God. That's not the word of the kingdom because this word to be

understood requires previous work. Have you ever watched a movie that's got a Roman numeral two in its title, RoboCop 2? I don't know.

I'm just pulling something out of the air here. I'm not a RoboCop fan, but there's movies about the X-Men. There's movies about Star Wars.

And the problem with picking one at random, especially one that's got a Roman numeral in its name, Halloween 3 with Jamie Lee Curtis or something, I think that was what she was in. If you pick number three and start trying to watch it, typically, if it's any kind of an actually decent series, you should have gone back and watched one and two first so that you're read into the picture. If you're watching an episodic narrative, you don't dive into the middle.

You need to start at the beginning and lay the groundwork, know who the characters are, what the complexities of the plot are, what is the challenge that results in the crisis? How is it resolved? You need some background information to make sense of the sequel, right? That's the situation here. They hear the word of the kingdom and they do not understand it. What's the problem? The word of the kingdom is a sequel to Old Testament revelation and they're not read in to the original.

Make sense? So if you hear the word of the kingdom and you're not equipped to understand it, you did not equip yourself to understand it, the evil one is going to come and take that word away. There is a momentary challenge. Hey, there's a kingdom coming.

Oh, there is? Well, what do you mean kingdom? And what do I need to change? And if you don't figure that out pretty soon, that issue is going to go away. And you're going to say, oh, there's a bunch of crazy people running around hither and yon talking about, you know, the Messiah has come or whatever. I don't have time for that.

And the decision point, the opportunity goes on by. I hear there's some guy that built a big boat when we don't even have water. He says, you know, that's the way to be saved.

And there's a flood coming. Yeah, I don't think so. There's a time of opportunity.

Then the door shuts and stays shut for seven days that we decided door shut for seven days. Then the rain starts falling that window of opportunity. That's what Jesus is talking about here.

Point of application. Don't view the seed parables as communicating about evangelism, the process of evangelism, the fruit of evangelism, the means of evangelism, the hazards of evangelism, or why people don't get saved because that's not what it's about. The gospel does not require prior knowledge.

Knowledge, the people of God were enjoined to have the law of God, have it on their

forehead, have it bound to their hand, have it on their doorpost, review it when they went out. And when they came in, that was a command to the saved old Testament. Saint people of God to know their scriptures because they didn't know them.

When Jesus came and presented the simple truth of the kingdom, John and later Jesus, they didn't understand it. And it was easy for Satan to come and remove that word away. And what happens when the seed is removed? What is that a picture of? You say, Oh, that mean old Satan took the seed.

It's not about Satan. He's got no use for the seed. It's about the soil.

What does it mean for that hard packed soil by the wayside? While the seed is laying there, there is an opportunity for it to sink in and bear fruit. Once the seed is removed, opportunity is gone. You can't grow seed.

That's no longer there. So it speaks of a limited opportunity. John only preached for so long.

Jesus is only going to preach with his disciples, the opportunity to change their minds as a nation and receive the kingdom for a short time. And if they don't receive it, if they don't pull up their old Testament scripture and parse that message, that opportunity is going to be gone. The seed will be removed.

That's the idea. So that is our first point about the kingdom is it's not salvation. And it is important for us to understand because if you say, okay, well, I get it now.

This is the kingdom for Israel. They missed it. He came into his own, his own received him, not John one 11 and 12, but as many as received him, they got the word.

I'm that far along. We're about to go to our break. Let me just give you one final passage.

Turn quickly to the very end of the book of acts. It's the last page before the first page of Romans verses 30 and 31 of acts chapter 28. Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house.

This is Paul who has gone to Rome, right? Membership rec and all the rest of it. He's in Rome. Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house and received all who came to him doing what verse 31 preaching the kingdom of God.

This is acts. Jesus has been gone for years. The church age is well underway.

Paul is preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, confidence, no one forbidding him. It's a great way for the kingdom of God. So is the kingdom of God important for us to understand? Evidently so, because that's what Paul spent his final years in Rome doing preaching the kingdom of

God.

So we need to know what it is, how we're supposed to think about it. And that's what we will resume when we come back from our break.