

Matthew 21-01-28a

Good evening, welcome to the Thursday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're going to continue our excavation of or exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, resuming in chapter 13 where we left off, looking at these seven parables of the Kingdom of Heaven. There are seven, only Matthew presents these seven parables.

We have two of them in the Gospel of Mark and one of them echoed in the Gospel of Luke, but Matthew presents these seven. He of course wrote his Gospel primarily to the nation of Israel and they are the focus of this teaching block as with much of what we find in the Gospel of Matthew. So we're going to be picking up tonight, looking at the parable of the dragnet.

We'll do a little bit of review and enhancing our understanding of what we've covered so far and then we'll be picking up at verse 47. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin. Father it is a wonderful privilege to be called by your name, to have been adopted into your family through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, to represent him on this earth as his body and to redeem the time that has been allocated to us, to grow in grace and knowledge, to be thoroughly equipped for every good work and to prepare ourselves for those ages which are to come.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word this evening that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, impress it on each heart. May each of us be blessed and enabled to more closely follow the example set by the Lord Jesus Christ in living by the power of your word and the presence of your Holy Spirit. We pray these things in Jesus name, amen.

Just by way of a quick overflight of the landscape that we are covering at this time, in the gospel of Matthew, once we have the birth narrative and Jesus at the age of 12 and then he begins his ministry with the baptism of John. There is the descent of the Holy Spirit like a dove. There is the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness of which we have a representative sampling in turn these stones to bread, jump off the pinnacle of the temple and bow down and I'll give you all of these kingdoms.

There were many other temptations that Jesus did not choose to share with the disciples who eventually had their reminiscences committed to scripture. We may learn about some more of those in future times. But with that Jesus commenced and continued presenting the imminency of the kingdom to the nation of Israel.

Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And there was a window of opportunity, much as those who would pass by and see Noah and his sons hammering away on the ark. What are you doing? Well, a lot of water coming, we're building a big boat.

Scoff, deride, not interested, don't think it's going to happen, and it ends up being only the family of Noah, eight souls saved through water. Many others had an opportunity.

There was a time that anyone could have entered the ark.

But once God closed the door, nothing happened for several days. Then suddenly an unprecedented breaking up of the fountains of the deep and descent of water from above flooded the earth. And 14 months later, Noah and seven other people emerge.

In the same way, when John the Baptist began confronting his generation, like the prophet Elijah, with their responsibility as the covenant people of God to prepare themselves and prepare the way for the Lord, because the kingdom is at hand. There was a time of opportunity. Are they going to receive it or are they going to reject it? The manifesto for the kingdom was presented in the what is popularly known as the Sermon on the Mount.

I like to call it the teaching on the hill. Matthew chapter five through chapter seven was the teaching portion. That's almost solid red ink there.

Then in chapters eight through 10, Jesus demonstrates his authority and we have miracles and additional teaching that are presented at the end of chapter 10. Jesus has made an evaluation that the gospel of the kingdom is not being accepted. There are a few who respond, but there begins to be opposition.

There begins to be nitpicking. There begins to be active questioning and naysaying on the part of the religious leadership in particular. And at that point, Jesus shifts gears.

He sent out his disciples. If you flip back a couple of pages, you will see that the presentation of the their mission is in chapter five. And when they return, John the Baptist, in chapter 11, asks, Is there one messiah? or are there two? You remember that.

Are you the one who comes? Or do we look for another? He knows that Jesus is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. He is the suffering servant of Isaiah and the Old Testament prophetic scriptures. But the Old Testament also reveals the coming king, the one who will rule on David's throne.

And there was a great theological debate at that time, as you will recall, is there one Messiah or two? Well, John's got some time to think in prison, and he says, I know you're the Lamb of God, I know who you are, you're the Son of God, you're the Christ. But are you the coming one? Are you also going to be the king, or do we look for another? And Jesus never gives a direct answer, hardly ever. He wants us to think, he wants us to put together what we already know, and he says, go back and tell John what you see.

And the details of what he reminds John answers John's question from the Word of God. And that is in chapter 11. But Jesus says at that point, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare you.

We reviewed this on Sunday. What did you go out to see? He's the prophet and he's

Elijah if you were receptive, but you are not. Up to this point in Matthew, it's indeterminate how the people are going to respond.

They're scratching their heads, they haven't made up their minds. But beginning in chapter 12, you begin to see the resistance. Your disciples are doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath.

In verse 10, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Because they wanted to accuse him. And the opposition and the resistance is beginning to coagulate, it's beginning to coalesce. And Jesus says, a house divided against itself can't stand in that same chapter.

You've got to make a choice. He talks about the unpardonable sin, he talks about the tree that is known by its fruit. Well, he talks about the unclean spirit, if it's driven out and it isn't replaced with a presence, it's going to come back with its friends and the end is going to be worse than the beginning, right? This is the warning music that begins to play in the background of Matthew's narrative.

So that when you come to chapter 13, our chapter, Jesus is presenting parables. And the disciples say, why are you talking in parables? And he says, this is now a time of discernment. To those to whom it is given, these things are going to be clear.

But if it's not given, everything is in parables, seeing they see and don't perceive, hearing they hear and don't understand. Jesus has not told parable one in the first 12 chapters of Matthew. Why does he start preaching in parables now? Because the center of mass has shifted to rejection.

And so the teaching that he is going to do for those who are receptive, those who do want to learn and grow, is going to be veiled. It is going to be given in a form that only those who have a love for the Father are going to understand. Anyone who had already loved God, the Father, already been looking for his Messiah, were receptive to them.

It is given to understand the teaching of the Lord Jesus. And that has persisted down to the present day. There is a lot of misunderstanding of the parables.

There's a lot of misunderstanding of scripture. There's a lot of wrong interpretation and faulty understanding for the very same reason. A lot of people come to scripture.

A lot of people claim that they love God and love one another and so on. But the proof of the pudding is their fruit. By their fruit ye shall know them, Jesus said when he began to discern that there was starting to be more reaction than there was response.

Look for the fruit. What is the fruit? Tares can grow up and look an awful lot like the wheat. But that particular species of Darnell, I was reading a little more about it this past week.

It is afflicted with a particular kind of fungus. And this fungus, if you do try to go ahead and consume any of that Darnell, it's poisonous to animals and people. So instead of producing heads of wheat that are beneficial, the Darnell actually harbors this poisonous fungus.

And that's why it's important to uproot that stuff and get it out of the field before you harvest the wheat so that you don't get that stuff mixed in with your good crop. But there was a time of opportunity and now Jesus is talking in parables. The truth and the life and the way that Jesus represents and that his teaching is imbued with is still available, but it is encoded in the parables.

Who has the key to decode and understand these parables? Those to whom it is given. To those outside, it's a riddle and we can't figure out what it means. Well, that persists all the way down to the present day.

And so we've been endeavoring to be those who by faith and patience inherit the promise, those who by asking and seeking and knocking receive the key. These are parables of the kingdom of heaven. And I mentioned that at some point I would tell you my take on the difference between kingdom of heaven, which is almost exclusive to Matthew and kingdom of God, which you find in Mark and Luke.

Are they synonymous? And I shared my understanding. This is just my understanding. Feel free to understand it differently.

But there are two aspects that I think this vocabulary suggests. One is that the kingdom of heaven suggests more of the environment. Kingdom of God implies focusing on the source.

And with that comes a parallel or concomitant understanding. Matthew is the only one that has a number of these parables, particularly this last set that we are looking at, the dragnet and so on. If you look at your chapter 13, at the head of each of these parables, you'll see the parallel passages listed in your New King James, or almost any Bible you use.

So the parable of the sower, it says, well, you've got this in Mark chapter 4 and in Luke chapter 8. And then you have that explanation of the purpose of parables. And then the parable of the sower is explained. And that also is paralleled in Mark and Luke.

But notice the parable of the wheat and the tares. There are no parallel passages. The wheat and the tares is only in the gospel of Matthew.

The kingdom of heaven is like. Now hold that thought because what's the big idea in the wheat and the tares? There is a mixture of bad with good. The parable of the sower, what do people do with the word, right? And that is common to the message in Mark and Luke as well as in Matthew.

But well, let me just give you the punchline ahead of time so that this will make sense. Matthew is addressing the world, the larger group within which you find God's faithful people. Those who are bearing fruit, the wheat that are going to be harvested and the wheat is going to be gathered into the barn, that fruit of receiving the seed and growing.

These are the sons of the kingdom. These are the good guys, right? But the wheat and the tares, unlike the parable of the sower, you've got something that initially looks good, but it's actually not. And this is true of the world.

The field is the world. And Matthew in these seven parables about the kingdom of heaven says, this is true in the context where we're not just looking at the good guys. We're looking at the admixture.

We're looking at the environment, kingdom of heaven. What is in the environment of God's people? What are you going to experience to your right hand and to your left? And so it begins to make sense that the kingdom of heaven is like a field where you've got good seed sowed, but then an enemy comes and sows tares amongst the wheat and they have to grow together. It's in the environment of the kingdom of heaven.

When you go to the other gospels and look at parables where Jesus says, the kingdom of God is like, you'll find that those parables by and large focus on the good guys. The kingdom of God, here are the people who are related to God, who are the sons of the kingdom, and that's what the kingdom of God is like. So kingdom of God tends to focus on those who have a relationship with God, who belong to God and where kingdom of heaven says, yeah, you've got those people, but here's what's in the environment.

This is what's under heaven. You know, the rain falls on the just and the unjust under heaven. So that's a clue, a suggestion.

Well, then we had the parable of the mustard seed and the kingdom of heaven is like, and notice the mustard seed is found in Mark and Luke and you remember we talked about the smallness of the seed and then the largeness of the tree that grows from it and then birds come and roost in the branches. And of all of the times when you can think about birds and the problems that they cause, we talked about Abraham trying to keep the split animals free until God would come and affirm the covenant with him. And he spends all day shooing the birds away.

You remember the birds that fed Elijah by the brook Cherith. You remember the birds that Jesus talked about at the beginning of this chapter that would snatch away the seed that falls on the hard packed soil. And you can put with that the picture of the tree in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar where the tree grows up and animals come to rest in its shade and birds roost in its branches, but then that tree gets cut down and there's a band put around the stump and so on.

Well, birds roosting in the branches, these are all of the others who get benefits from the kingdom of Babylon without actually being the Babylonians. They're roosting in the branches, the animals are resting in the shade, but they are not a part of the tree per se. And the tree is basically Nebuchadnezzar himself.

And there are good and bad who all benefit from the power and the peace that resulted from his conquests. But the birds, it's like leaven. When you see birds flapping around, they almost always represent something not good unless they are a specific kind of bird, which is the eagle or the dove.

Dove as the Holy Spirit, the eagle is the face of the cherubim and those who mount up with wings like eagles. But when it's just the birds of the air making nests in branches, it's a different thing. So then we saw the parable of the leaven and you notice that that is only in Luke and leaven is always a symbol of evil.

You just can't get around that. Leaven is evil. And so in the parable of the mustard seed, you have something that grows up, but then something bad begins to inhabit it.

In the leaven, you have something good, which is meal. And then the leaven permeates it and changes its character. It starts out as one thing and it becomes something else and it is permeated.

This is invisible until you begin to see its effects. And once the leaven has gotten through the whole lump, that lump is going to start to swell with that excreta that comes from the microbes. And so then once again, Jesus talks about prophecy and parables and then he explains the parable of the tares.

And we see that the tares represent something that initially looks good, but over time you begin to realize that it is not good and it is going to be harvested at the end of the age. So the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl, we just covered that. I'm not going to really review that in detail, except to say that an alternate interpretation, and I tell you this because I do my very best and tell you what I think, but there are other good ideas and I am not infallible and they're interesting.

And sometimes it may be that it's not either or, it's both and. But one suggestion that has some merit as an alternate way to understand this, instead of the selfish man who's in it for his own good, he's trying to force his way into the kingdom, he cheats the field owner by paying him only what the dirt's worth instead of what the treasure is worth. And then the merchant who is on the up and up looking for pearls, everybody knows it, when he finds one he sells what he has and buys it for its beauty.

As an aside, let me finish my interpretation of the parable of the man who finds the hidden treasure in the field. One thing I didn't cover on Sunday that I want to mention, look at this again now, we're in Matthew chapter 13 and verse 44. There's treasure

hidden in a field, a man finds it and hides it again.

It's not his field. He's walking across it, taking a shortcut. It's not being watched or used for anything evidently, but he finds the treasure and then he evidently, this is not known to the field owner.

So he buries it again, then he goes and buys the field so that he can go back and get the treasure. The one word I did not talk about on Sunday and this is cheating the owner out of what his land is actually worth because it contains a treasure, right? Because he hides the treasure, nobody knows what the field is really worth. And this is theft.

You're thieving the owner. It doesn't matter how the treasure got there. It's just like mineral rights or oil or anything else.

If you suddenly discover that a worthless piece of land has got oil underneath it and Jed Clampett comes out there shooting at some food and you discover this, well now the land is immensely valuable and that's how the Clampetts become millionaires is they are paid what their land is really worth with this hidden treasure. So this guy is to my eye kind of a rascal. However, one thing I did not bring out by way of application when we covered this last Sunday, do you see a word that we didn't talk about at all? Why does the guy sell all he has and buys the field? What does Jesus say is his reason for joy? He finds the treasure and for joy sells all he has and he's going to buy it.

I didn't talk about the joy. I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart, down in my heart to stay, right? There is a deceptive element to a kind of Christianity that finds a treasure in the field and is going to benefit from it and be really happy in the benefit. He's not twiddling the ends of his mustache like I don't know who twiddles their mustache now, but when I was a kid it was Snidely Whiplash.

He had the tall black hat and the cape and he had the pointy mustache and he enjoys the evil of it. This is enjoying what is perceived to be benefit and profit from it, ignoring the cheat that is done to the landowner. I'm joyful because I have got this all figured out and maybe he says he's going to donate a portion of it to charity.

I don't know how he, but he's really, there's a lot of joy associated with discovering this treasure and then in an illicit manner obtaining it. The joy is real. The treasure is real, but the manner of obtaining it is illicit and the joy masks the operation of conscience.

This is my point. I believe, feel free to disagree, but I believe that there is a flavor, there is a kind, there is a trend and I think a large trend in modern day American Christianity in particular where the things of God create a kind of joy and there is an investment in it, there is an occupation with it, there is a real genuine enjoyment that fails to check conscience and what is actually right in God's eyes in its operation and winds up selling its soul for pottage, winds up making merchandise of the word of God. Well, but if we

merchandise, I can rationalize that, I can make more, I can do more, I can reach further.

Making merchandise of the word of God, finding the treasure, buying the field at a bargain and then selling the treasure at a profit and I really think this is a great thing doesn't account for the cheat that is done to the field owner. For joy he sells what he has and buys the field, but the treasure is hidden. He's not paying full price.

He's not paying what he ought to pay. How is this different than Ananias and Sapphira? Selling their field for a lot but only bringing part of it to the church. What happened to them? Anything wrong with that? It was the deception that caused them to drop dead.

They wanted to enjoy what everybody else in the church was enjoying and selling assets and bringing it for the common good, but there was this illicit failure to check their conscience and the joy masked the evil. Ananias drops dead. Sapphira comes in, drops dead.

And you think, well, but they gave most of the money to the church. How is that wrong? Didn't consult conscience. Didn't play honestly and buying the field for less than what it's worth because the treasure is hidden is theft.

It is illicit. It is immoral. It is unethical.

And it is wrong. It's more wrong than Ananias and Sapphira who at least said, I sold the field and here's some money. This guy is worse in my view.

So I just wanted to add the observation that there is joy involved here. And I think the guy is so joyful at the prospect of the profit that he can make and the progress he can make that he ignores the ethical side, the moral side, what is right in the eyes of God. God knows what's hidden in that field.

And the fact that the owner doesn't shouldn't change the fact that an honest man would have gone and said, I found a treasure in your field. And the owner might say, wow, thank you for letting me know. Here's the finder's fee or let's split the proceeds 50-50.

I would know it was there if you hadn't found it and it would have been fair. It would have been just like the pearl merchant who paid fair price. Notice it is a pearl of great price.

He knows exactly what the great price is and he pays the great price fully. Doesn't cheat. And that's what I see as the difference.

Let me just tell you in passing that another traditional and somewhat popular interpretation of these two parables says that the man, the purchaser in each case who sells what he has, all that he has is the Lord Jesus. And in the first parable, the treasure hidden in the field is Israel and the field is the world. Israel is a hid treasure.

The world doesn't appreciate Israel. They're small and unappreciated. But Jesus knows that there is this one treasure and he will give all that he has to pay for the sins of the world basically to redeem Israel.

That's fair. I can see how you could make that work. I'm not sure how I would make personal application of that.

I always like to find what steps on my toes and makes me think more carefully about how I'm living. But it's fair. It could be that it's the Lord Jesus.

And in this first case, the treasure hid in the field is Israel. I'm not sure why it gets hidden again. Maybe they're hidden because their age is going to stop and they're going to emerge after the price is paid and it's the millennial kingdom.

You could make that work. So I offer you that as full disclosure. There are people who see it that way.

And then the second parable, the pearl of great price is the church. And he sells all that he has for the pearl. And so he purchases Israel in the first case.

He purchases the pearl in the second case. Again, with the church being a mystery that didn't get revealed until Paul reveals it, that parable would have been completely inscrutable. Why do you tell it to somebody who isn't going to understand it? Maybe that's it.

But just to be fair, that is probably the more popular of the many interpretations of these. I'm sticking with my understanding. It really convicts me to make sure that I'm looking for the value and not developing some subterfuge or hidden self-interest where I'm actually trying to gratify myself in the process of obtaining a treasure.

We are supposed to seek and search for treasure, but we do it on the up and up. We don't steal someone else's and try to make it our own. Well, that brings us to the parable of the dragnet.

And I've managed to use up all of my time in the review, but I wanted to remind all of us what the context of this is and why Jesus is giving these seven kingdom of heaven parables in Matthew 13. He doesn't start teaching in parables until the hostile negativity, he came into his own and his own received him not. But for the remnant that do receive, he can preach publicly and anyone in the mix who loves God is going to have it given to them.

They will be given the key to understand. And notice Jesus gives the key to a couple of the parables. He interprets a few of them, but not all of them.

Why? Same reason when you're in a textbook, studying whatever subject and it comes

to the problems at the end of the chapter, they'll give you a couple that are worked out and then the rest of them based on what you've seen given the problem and answer, you should be able to work the rest of them yourself. We should be able to work the rest of these out ourselves. What is the common element in the ones that Jesus interpreted himself? All of them talk about under the kingdom of heaven, the environment, that there is evil in the world.

Satan is its sponsor and its encourager. He is the power behind it. And the believers to whom Jesus was speaking in his day and believers in our day need to be aware of that.

And even if we are as harmless as doves, we need to be as wise as serpents. Wise as serpents, we need to know everything the enemy's doing and yet ourselves be harmless. And forewarned is forearmed.

And to know that there are those who look like they're legitimate, they're making a legitimate purchase of a field, but they've got surreptitious, invisible objectives at work that are self-seeking, self-gratifying and are actually not right in the eyes of God. We need to know that. We need to be careful.

We need to be wise as serpents. We want to be like that merchant who is searching, not stumbling on it by accident and saying, hey, here's a good thing. We're seeking and searching.

We're asking and knocking. And when we find it, we're all in and we enjoy it for its beauty. You notice the pearl merchant, it doesn't talk about his joy.

He recognizes its value. It's an objective assessment. You go back to the seed that fell in the shallow soil, all excited, springs up in a day, but it doesn't last under pressure.

And you get the idea of this field buying guy. He's very joyful at the beginning, but that's going to come to a bad end. The pearl merchant is objective, recognizes the price, pays the price, and he possesses this thing he's been seeking.

That's what we're after. Well, now we're ready with this as background context and review to tackle the parable of the dragnet, and we'll do that as soon as we come back from our break.