

Matthew 21-02-07a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We continue this morning our study in the Gospel of Matthew, finishing up chapter 13 and addressing ourselves at the threshold of the door to chapter 14. It's wonderful to join you on this morning.

We've survived a month of the new year and are looking forward to what remains to see what unfolds in the providences of God in his provision for us in troublous times. And this passage that is before us is no small part of that provision. It is the nourishment for our souls and it is particularly pertinent for the times in which we live.

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 grateful for your power, your knowledge and wisdom in weaving together the events of history, the circumstances of our lives and the opportunities that we have to learn and to grow in this space of time between our salvation and our ultimate destination. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together this morning, that God, the Holy Spirit will enliven it, help us to see its truth and how it applies in our thoughts and actions, the way we address our values and our goals and set our priorities.

We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus will be glorified and we ask it in his name. Amen. So we have now finished Matthew chapter 13.

And before we leave it, I just wanted to climb a tree and get a fix on a couple of known points, make sure we know exactly where we are as we navigate this book, what has just been accomplished in covering this chapter. You may remember that the structure of the gospel of Matthew is such that there is an introductory section, a beginning that took us from chapter one and chapter two, and then chapter three began the heart of the book. So chapter one and two, this showed us the birth narrative that Jesus is the son of David.

He is the son of Abraham. He is God with us. And we saw the coming of the King to bring the kingdom to the people of God.

Once we arrive at the adult years of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter three, we saw God verify the identity of his son through at the baptism with John. This is my beloved son. He then goes into the wilderness and is tempted by Satan and people begin to assemble and you have the teaching on the hill or the sermon on the Mount.

So in chapter three and four, you had the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you will, to the people. He is introduced by John the Baptist. He is endorsed by God.

He is tested by Satan and he is then listened to by the people. Then in chapter five through seven, we had the sermon on the Mount. So there was sort of a threefold

introduction to this first section.

I would say this first section of Matthew after the introduction is chapter three through chapter seven. It's introduced by the baptism, the temptation, and then the assembling of the crowds to hear him. And then there is that teaching section, chapter five, six, and seven called the sermon on the Mount.

Then in chapter eight through 10, we had the second section and in chapters eight and nine, we had three sets of three miracles. Remember that three sets of three miracles, chapter eight, chapter nine, and then in chapter 10, Jesus sends forth the 12 and you have that another teaching section. We have just finished the third great section of Matthew, which began in chapter 11 and 12 with the signs of rejection beginning to form.

There starts to be confrontation. There starts to be questioning and not the kind of enthusiasm one would hope for if one is introducing a kingdom. So Jesus rebukes that and then Jesus withdraws with the disciples.

We saw that at the end of chapter 12 when he was talking to the multitudes and his mother and brothers stood outside. And we're going to have another reference to the brothers here at the end of the chapter that we're dealing with now. Your mother and brothers are standing outside seeking to speak with you.

He answered and said, who is my mother and who are my brothers? Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Then we have chapter 13 with seven parables of the kingdom. We're coming to the conclusion of that section and we're going to start the fourth great section in Matthew, which is going to be chapter 14 through chapter 18. But as we conclude this section, we want to look back on it just briefly and kind of see what we have covered and where we are.

If you look just at the teaching sections that we've seen in these first three divisions of the book, the first one was chapter five through seven, which was the teaching on the mount. And what was that? This is really the manifesto. This is the capstone of the law of Moses, right? It goes beyond regulations and ordinances and talks about the spirit, the attitude, the humble, the poor, those who are persecuted and the attitude of faith and obedience that is rewarded by God with blessing and inheritance in the kingdom.

The kingdom is for those who know how to think kingdom thoughts, who know how to grow in their spirit and are rich toward God, whether or not they are rich in this world. In chapter, that was chapters five through seven. The second teaching section was when Jesus sent forth the 12 in chapter 10.

And if you look back at that, what is the reception going to be to the message of the kingdom that was detailed in chapters five through seven, verse 14 of chapter 10,

whoever will not receive you nor hear your words when you depart from that house or city, shake the dust off from your feet. So we move from presentation to what is the reception. People will be measured.

People will be judged. They will be evaluated based on their reaction or response to this message. And the same, of course, has been true down to the present day.

It is not enough to hear the word of God. It's not enough to know the word of God. What is our response to it? The opposition is coming.

Jesus told the disciples that in the second half of chapter 10, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, but you're supernaturally protected sheep. You are divinely commissioned sheep. So it's one of these things where it is going to appear quite a bit more unsafe than it actually is.

And when you have to act with courage and act with boldness in the face of that, which causes many others to fear and to quail and to tremble, the sustaining power is faith. Faith in what? Faith in the word, faith in the truth, faith in the Father, faith in the Lord Jesus. It's all about believing what has been revealed, believing what has been presented.

So as we look now at the conclusion of this third section, what did we learn? This is your pop quiz for the morning. We've had seven parables of the kingdom. We should be able to distill one main point.

There might've been many reverberations and many applications, applications, but we should be able to distill one primary point. This is really what a parable is designed to do. Parables are often resonant with meaning, but they generally make a single point, which is what keeps us from bending them all out of shape and reading things into them that aren't there is look at the point of the parable.

Well, we've had seven kingdoms of the parable here in Matthew chapter 13. So if I was to close my Bible and get a blank sheet of paper and number seven lines, A, could I remember what the parables are without looking at my Bible? And B, could I remember what the primary point of that parable as far as I am concerned is? I need to know how it concerned the people who first heard it and the people to whom it was addressed and then interpret and apply for myself. So as we leave chapter 13, I think it would behoove us or behoove us to review what we should take away from this chapter.

And notice I'm using take away as a verb and not a noun. What do we bring with us as we leave this chapter? Well, what was the first parable? Parable of the sower and the seed and the soils. I prefer to think of it as the parable of the soils because that is the point.

What kind of soil do I choose to be? Is everything okay? What kind of soil do I choose to

be? What kinds of soil are there? What are the problems that face the soil? So on line number one, what do I need to do? What do I need to watch out for? Where do I need to be alert to ensure that I have the kind of soil that is going to embrace the seed and enable it to produce? The power is in the seed, but the environment is created by the soil. What kind of soil am I? The seed has got the power to become everything God wants it to be. The seed can produce a hundredfold.

But what is the environment in which that seed is going to do its work? Is it hard packed and the seed can't even remain there for long? Is it shallow so that the seed doesn't sink in deep and its effect and fruit does not last, does not endure? As soon as hardship comes, I am seedless. I am fruitless. Do I entertain and allow thorns and weeds and such to co-dwell, to be in the soil along with the seed so that as the seed tries to grow and have its fruit, it is choked.

The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of material things, deceitfulness of material security, possessions, backup plans, technology, nothing wrong with those things. Nothing wrong with having money, nothing wrong with paying attention and having concerns where concern is needed. But is it choking the word? Is it harmful and prevents that fruit? And this is how opinions differ and applications differ from person to person and from believer to believer because there's not a hard and fast rule.

We have to go to God and ask and seek and knock and examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith. But you can't look over the fence and say, well, so-and-so is doing X and so-and-so possesses Y and so-and-so is engaged in Z. So I can do likewise. The deceitfulness and the cares can be in any different area.

And you know that it's deceitful and you know that it's a care. You know that it's thorns in the soil when it chokes the word. How do you know the word is being choked? It's kind of hard to see.

Somebody walking by the field can say, well, there's a lot of weeds in there choking out that wheat. But if you are the soil and you have the wheat right there, it's kind of a myopia situation. It's a, you know, if you're farsighted and you can't see up close, it's not always easy.

So how do you know that the word is being choked? Well, the fruit of the word is coincident and synonymous with the fruit of the spirit, right? The spirit doesn't produce fruit in a vacuum. It is from, in, and through the word of God. So do I have love? Do I have joy? Do I have peace? Do I have patience? Am I able to put up with things that would crush a lesser person? Am I long-suffering? Am I gentle? Tactful? Sensitive? Know when to speak and when not to? Gentleness? Goodness? Can I tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong? Do I wind up scratching my head and going round and round and round trying to figure out, well, this might be right or it might be wrong.

Goodness, after we've been at it a while, ought to be obvious. It ought to be identifiable. We should know what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12.2, right? And if we're having difficulty, if we look at situations and it's a fog and it's a gray picture, maybe the word is being choked. Maybe there's too many other things going on. We're not devoting sufficient time to meditation, to reflection, to processing what we hear and what we know and gaining clarity from the word of God.

God the Holy Spirit will give us clarity and along with that clarity, he will give us both peace and power. We were talking yesterday about a situation where it's easy to know what ought to be, how things should be. It's not always possible to accomplish it.

The ability to do it isn't always there. I know I should lose 10 pounds. How do I lose 10 pounds? I know I should be in shape.

How do I get in shape? I know I should refrain from certain activities. Where is the power to pull back, to avoid, to not do those things? The knowledge is one thing. The Holy Spirit gives us that.

It gives us clarity, freedom from the weeds, freedom from the thorns. We can be free from the pressure of the cares of this world, but we also need the power. You've heard me say before the old Chantix commercial that they had to modify, but it used to say, the power to calm, the power to something else and the power to quit.

As though Chantix could give you the power to actually quit smoking. Well, it can suppress a certain amount of your craving, but it doesn't give you the power to quit. That has to come from a motivation that makes you take the Chantix and throw the cigarettes out and not buy more and substitute other positive habits in the place of the negative.

You can't just sit there looking at the empty table and trying not to go get a pack of cigarettes. You need to replace a bad habit with a good one. This is fairly common knowledge, but when Jesus told the story of the demon that was cast out and went into wilderness places, but when he returns, he finds the house clean and swept and unoccupied.

So he brings a bunch of his friends and moves back in. To break bad habits, bad behaviors, bad patterns, we need to establish good. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, patience, gentleness, goodness.

Sometimes goodness gets short shrift, but it takes practice and it takes effort and it takes concentration to produce that particular fruit of the spirit, goodness, to be good, to produce good, to identify it and to have the power to walk in righteousness. Goodness is righteousness. Righteousness comes by faith and it is the practice of faith instead of letting deleterious, harmful, sinful, negative thoughts circle in our brain.

We need not just to stop thinking those thoughts, but to replace them, to fill the cleaned house with something good. Think on these things, whatsoever things are good, noble, lovely, honorable, of good report. Think on these things to the extent that you can find those healthy, profitable, and glory-reflecting pieces.

Think on these things and the peace of God, which passes understanding, will keep your hearts and minds. Keep your hearts and minds and keep us in the good. So parable of the soil, we've got the word, it is going to go how deep? That's up to us.

Is it going to have an environment where it can flourish? Not just survive, but flourish, not be choked by cares and deceitfulness. That's all in the realm of thought. The deceitfulness of riches is what you think money or material security is going to do.

What you think having that next possession is going to accomplish. It's in the thought life, the cares of this world, it's thoughts. If you don't turn on the news, you don't care what's happening in Washington.

If you don't listen to what people are doing in other parts of the country, you don't get wrapped around the axle of defund this and burn down that and how are we going to fix this and where's the money going to come from and so forth. Deceitfulness, there is a deceitfulness when the government mails you a check and you think, well, things must be going well because I'm getting money in the mail. It's deceitful.

How do we escape? How do we remove the thorns, get rid of the cares of this world and the replace it? More seed in the soil, more wheat. Let the wheat choke out the thorns. If it's robust, healthy wheat, this is what you learn when you brush hog pastures.

The more you mow and let the good grass get a foothold, the fewer weeds you have. It's when a few weeds create shade and the good grass doesn't grow so well that more weeds come in and tolerating a few weeds, first thing you know, you've got a field of weeds, but if you mow, it's the weeds that suffer the most and get that grass growing pretty soon. It's a rare thing.

You can walk out in your pasture and just pull the occasional weed over acres because the grass has taken over and its roots have got firm grasp of that soil and a good hay field, you don't have to go weed it. There's very few weeds in it because it's so full of that good herbage. So fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.

This is what's coming up in chapter 14. We are moving into another section, the fourth of the five sections in Matthew, bracketed by the introduction and the conclusion, the climax. And in that fourth section, it is all about faith.

Faith is coming up. Faith, meekness, temperance. Meekness, of course, is humility.

The Lord Jesus Himself was a model of humility, an example of humility. He said, I am meek and lowly of heart. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

I am meek and lowly of heart. Take that yoke. You will find rest for your souls.

It's counterintuitive, isn't it? You take upon yourself the yoke and you find rest. Usually when you get the yoke, it's going to be a hard day of labor with your yoke fellow, plowing, pulling, hauling. But Jesus said, take my yoke upon you and learn of me.

My yoke is easy. My burden is light. You will find rest for your souls under this yoke.

Meekness, humility. And temperance, of course, in the old King James, this is self-control. The greatest gift you can give a child, whether you're a teacher or a parent or a grandparent or any other person in the periphery of influence for children, is to help them cultivate self-control, impulse control.

See little kids riding in the shopping basket that their mask-wearing parents are pushing around in the grocery store and parent is trying to find, you know, the right kind of jello or whatever. And the child is reaching out and grabbing stuff off the shelf, pulling it into the floor. That's lack of impulse control.

Are these your toys? Does any of this on the shelf belong to you? No, you're not to touch. Don't touch things that don't belong to you. When we go to the store, don't grab stuff.

Well, it doesn't change when we mature and become adults. Impulse control. That Amazon screen is before you.

Think. Calculate. Refer to the budget.

Is this a want? Is it a need? Temperance, a fruit of the spirit, something that walking with the Lord in faith will give us is self-control. So with those things, the fruit of the spirit is the fruit of the word. This is the wheat in your soul.

So as we think about that first parable of the soils and the things that can prevent having a 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold production in our lives, we have a very clear and memorable summary, don't we? We first of all need to pay attention when it is presented so that it doesn't sit on the surface and quickly disappear. We need to be careful about joy. Remember the shallow soil? We went back and revisited that one detail.

When they hear the word, they receive it with joy. There's a lot of joy-centered worship today, but joy cannot interfere with depth. Jesus associated shallowness with joy.

They hear the word, receive it with joy, but in the shallow soil, it doesn't take root. And the first time the sun comes up on a hot day, it withers and dies, and you don't have production. You cannot rely on joy to get you through tough times.

Patience, peace, perseverance, but you can't think back to a joyful worship service when you're in grinding pain and a grueling test. The joy of past days, if anything, by contrast, can depress you. I don't have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

Where is the joy? Joy is a wonderful thing. But it's like many other things. Let your moderation be known unto all the Lord is near.

So parable of the soils. It's a wonderful review. If you think about Matthew 13 and think about the seven parables, remember that first parable, there's a lot of life truth contained therein.

Think your way through. How many kinds of soil were there? What do they represent? What about my life? And I say, well, but you know, I've got a Bible and lots of notes and I go to Grace and Truth Bible Church, so I've got to be well on the way to the central districts of the mansion area of the new Jerusalem. We need to examine ourselves, hold up that parable and those similes as a mirror and ensure that we are what we think we are and we're doing what we're supposed to do and we can eliminate proactively without waiting for the judgment of God.

If we judge ourselves, we will not be judged. Wouldn't it be great if I proactively identify patterns and problems in my life and in the power of the word and in the power of the spirit, choke them out with production by faith, obedience, presenting myself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, not trying to bring a meal offering that's got some ground up thorns in it because I didn't clean up my field. So that's the first parable.

And remember that central section, we have two central explanations and it's a reminder. Jesus doesn't just string out seven kingdom parables. He includes analysis and explanation right after that first parable.

Why is it that you can understand and others cannot? Why is it that some in Israel were Jesus' sheep and heard his voice and followed him and others did not? The Calvinist will say it was all predestined. Jesus says the love of the father is not in you. That's why you do not hear my words.

That's why you don't know who I am. That's why although you study the scriptures and they speak of me, I'm standing in front of you and you can't see me. It's the most heart-rending, scary thing in the early new testament is watching the account as people come face to face with the physical presence of the Lord Jesus.

Scholars of their Bible can't recognize who he is. Face to face with the divine son of God can't tell who he is. And they are scholars of the word.

They can quote chapter and verse out of the law and the prophets like nobody's business. But when it comes to reality, when it comes to life, they are completely dysfunctional. That's scary.

So after that first parable, Jesus says it's going to be inscrutable to some, but it has been given to you to understand. Why has it been given? This is a good question to ask. I had a friend post something about election and comparing election of Israel with election that the new testament talks about.

Paul talks about it in Ephesians chapter one, electing him before the foundation of the world and so on. And it's a good question to ask. You can say, well, elect for what purpose? Why? It's always, you know, we say who, what, when, where, and we put why on the end.

Sometimes why ought to be the first question we ask. Why did God choose Israel? Israel, my chosen. Israel is my people of all the nations of the world.

I didn't choose you because you were large or powerful or talented. I chose you for why? It's a good question to ask. When the new testament talks about election, we say, you know, Calvinists make a big issue out of, well, you're elect for salvation.

Well, is that what scripture says? What is the answer to the question? Why chosen? Paul on the Damascus road gets his election. He talks about it in Galatians chapter one, verse 15. And he says, I was chosen before I was born, but he doesn't say I was chosen for salvation.

I was chosen to preach the gospel. John the Baptist was chosen before he was born to be the forerunner chosen for a purpose. The choosing of the church is not just to get us saved.

It is for us to be the body of Christ with all of his parts and functions. Not everyone is an ear. Not everyone is a hand.

Not everyone is a foot. We all have a place and a function chosen. We were chosen to live in this place.

And in this time surrounded by whatever family and friends and coworkers we have, we were chosen for this. So what Jesus says after this first parable is going to be mirrored when he gives that second explanatory section. So we want to understand the seven parables and their main point of application for us and the setting that Jesus puts them in.

What are these parables for? They are both for fruitful application on the part of those who hear and understand, and they are a separator. They are inevitably going to reveal who has a love for the father and who does not. If there's love for the father, they're going to be Jesus' sheep.

They're going to hear his voice and follow him. If they do not have a love for the father, the parables exclude understanding instead of revealing it. We don't want to be the

latter.

We want to be the former. So we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll see if we can speed up just a little bit because this first one is really a paradigm for what we want to do as we leave this chapter.

And we'll review the other six kingdom parables. We'll see a few more fascinating details about the concluding section there and prepare ourselves to start chapter 14. But let's pause here and take our break.