

# THE PARABLES

A 2-WEEK STUDY OF MATTHEW 13



Welcome to BSF's two-week study of The Parables! We hope God speaks to you through His Word and your group discussion.

**Here's how the Bible study works:**

- Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
- Discuss your answers with your small group at the end of the week.
- Listen to a podcast teaching on the week's passage.
- Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.
- Repeat!

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others.

Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!

# WEEK ONE

MATTHEW 13:1-30, 36-43



## Focus Verse

“But blessed are your eyes because they see,  
and your ears because they hear.”

Matthew 13:16



# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

## Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, reconciled, guided, etc.?
  
2. What from the notes, lecture, group sharing, or personal study impacted you most in the past week?

## Day 2: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

*Jesus taught the parable of the soils.*

3. What is a parable?
  
4. In Jesus' first parable, what do each of the following signify?  
The sower: \_\_\_\_\_  
The seed: \_\_\_\_\_  
The soil along the path: \_\_\_\_\_  
The birds that snatch the seed: \_\_\_\_\_  
The rocky soil: \_\_\_\_\_  
The thorny soil: \_\_\_\_\_  
The good soil: \_\_\_\_\_
5.
  - a. Which seed accomplished its intended purpose? What evidence demonstrated this?
  
  - b. In all four examples, think about the sower, the seed, and the soil. What was the same in all four accounts and what was different?
  
  - c. What lessons can you draw from the responses in the different soils?



# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

## Day 3: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

*Jesus explained the parable of the soils to His disciples.*

6. Give examples of how the evil one “snatches away” the message of God’s kingdom today.
  
7. How are you sometimes distracted by the “worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth”?
  
8. Give reasons why the seed in good soil can produce varying results. (See John 15:5; Philippians 2:12-13.)
  
9. In your own words, summarize the teaching of the parable of the soils.
  
10. What is the condition of the “soil” of your heart? How do you know?

## Day 4: Matthew 13:10-17; Isaiah 6:9-10

*Jesus explained His purpose in teaching in parables to His disciples, not the crowd.*

11. a. What reason did Jesus give for speaking in parables?  
  
b. Why might Jesus have changed His approach to His teaching at this point in His ministry?  
  
c. How does Jesus’ quote from Isaiah explain what Jesus knew about the people who followed Him?
  
12. a. In what ways are Jesus’ followers blessed with the “secrets of the kingdom of heaven”?





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

- b. How has God illuminated His truth to bless your life?

## Day 5: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

*Jesus taught and explained the parable of the weeds.*

13. What do each of the following signify in this parable?

The two sowers: \_\_\_\_\_

The good seed: \_\_\_\_\_

The weeds: \_\_\_\_\_

The harvest: \_\_\_\_\_

The harvesters: \_\_\_\_\_

14. a. How does the phrase “while everyone was sleeping” help you understand how Satan opposes Christ’s work?

- b. Why did the farmer warn the workers not to pull the weeds until the harvest?

- c. Why is distinguishing between believers and unbelievers difficult for us?

- d. As a believer, why should you focus more on sowing the seed of the gospel than on “pulling weeds”?

## Day 6: Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

*God knows who truly follows Jesus and who does not.*

15. How has this passage helped your understanding of what matters in life and for eternity?





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43



## Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

### Focus Verse

“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.” – Matthew 13:16

- The Parable of the Soils – Matthew 13:1-23
- The Parable of the Weeds – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

### Engage

Farmers put seeds in the dirt and wait for plants to grow. When the time is right, the crops are ripe. Then they harvest the fruit of their labors. The contributing factors of the seed, weather, weeds, and quality of the soil are mostly beyond the farmer’s control. But in the end, the return on the harvest determines the success of the crop. **In Matthew 13, Jesus taught spiritual truths through stories about planting and harvesting.** Like the farmer’s harvest, the reality of our lives and the truth about who we really are will be revealed in a harvest day to come. On that day, our response to God, His Son Jesus, and the gospel matters more than anything else.

With opposition rising, Jesus’ teaching ministry turned a new direction. He knew the true heart motivation of each individual within the curious crowd that followed Him. Jesus’ message draws out belief in some people and unbelief in others. The divisions that began to surface in chapters 11 and 12 are illustrated in the parables of Matthew 13. Jesus invested in the spiritually responsive. He taught His disciples deeper truths about His kingdom while withholding spiritual mysteries from those who refused to believe. Matthew 13 presents eight parables that teach important truths that believing hearts can comprehend. The two parables in this week’s lesson expose various responses to God’s truth. **God knows who truly follows Jesus and who does not.** What will the harvest reveal about you? How receptive are you to God and the truths of His kingdom?





## The Parable of the Soils – Matthew 13:1-23

### Jesus Told the Parable to the Crowd – 13:1-9

#### The Setting – 13:1-3a

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus taught and preached in the synagogues.<sup>1</sup> Although these doors were not entirely closed to Him, teaching there became increasingly difficult.<sup>2</sup> **As Jewish rejection escalated, Jesus taught almost exclusively outside synagogues, often outdoors or in private homes.** He preached where people gathered to listen.

Jesus sat on a boat to address a large crowd gathered on the shore. The change in the focus of Jesus' teaching is evident: "Then he told them many things in *parables* ...." **A parable is a practical, real-life story that illustrates a central spiritual truth.** Parables usually teach no more than one or two key lessons. The central idea is more important than trying to press every symbol for a distinct meaning. Matthew grouped parables in this chapter that teach the realities of

God's kingdom, which are recognized by some and rejected by others. The way people respond to Jesus and His rightful rule as King determines whether they face eternal judgment or eternal life.

#### The Parable – 13:3b-9

Jesus first told the parable to the crowd and later explained it to only His disciples in verses 18-23. **A farmer sowed seed that fell on four types of soil.** The receptivity of the soil determined whether or not the seed bore fruit. Some seed fell on the hardened ground along the path, where birds ate the seed before it could spring to life. Some seed fell in rocky places where the soil was too shallow for plants to thrive. These plants lacked the root system needed to survive the scorching sun. Some seed fell among thorns that choked out the plants. And finally, some seed fell on good soil, producing crops 100, 60, and 30 times what was sown.

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1: Teaching in synagogues: Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; Luke 4:16  
2: Hometown synagogue: Matthew 13:54-57

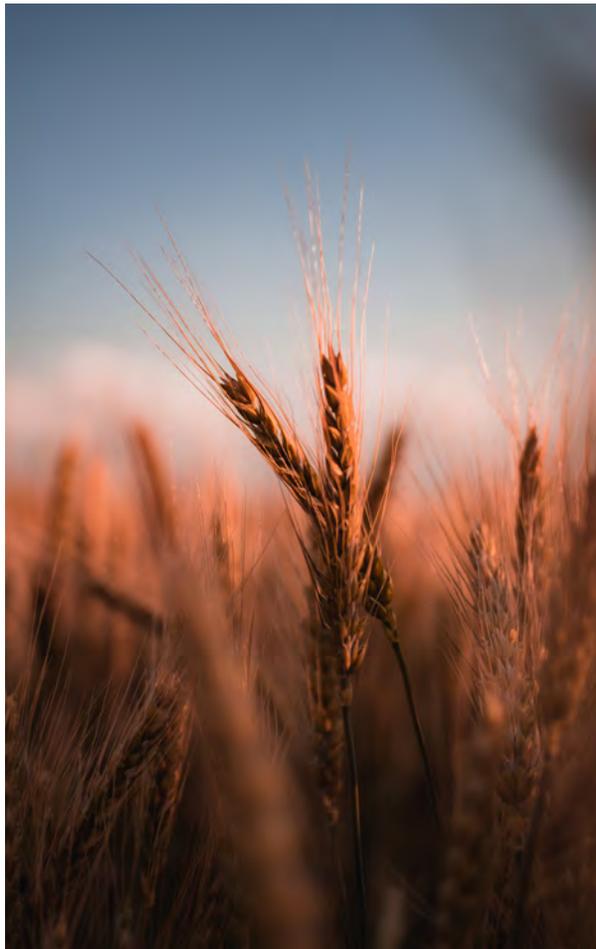




# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

Jesus ended His story with an admonition, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” **While the entire crowd heard Jesus’ words with their physical ears, only a minority allowed the truth to penetrate to their inner beings.** Jesus’ deeper teaching made no sense to those who tried to understand it with mere human intellect. People refused to respond to Jesus’ words and their spiritual deafness increased. The people who had ears to hear and receive Jesus’ teachings were those who recognized and surrendered to His authority. Jesus continued to reveal life-changing truth to the people whose spiritual ears were open. Spiritual truth is understood by the spiritually receptive through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ kingdom parables offer rich spiritual truth for believers today. We pray for an “ear” to hear and apply the deep truths that Jesus taught in His parables.



## Jesus Explained the Parable to His Disciples – 13:10-23

### Why Parables? – 13:10-17

**The disciples approached Jesus and asked Him why He was speaking to the people in parables.** Why would Jesus not clearly state what He was trying to convey? Jesus answered the disciples’ question, but His answer also helps us. We often wonder why people around us seem unable to comprehend basic spiritual truths that seem obvious and important to us.

At this point in Jesus’ earthly ministry, He began to distinguish between the two groups within the crowd. To the curious majority who did not believe, Jesus spoke in parables. To the receptive minority who followed Him despite opposition, Jesus spoke openly and with clarity. He explained that the “secrets of the kingdom” were given to believers and hidden from unbelievers.

**Understanding divine truth is not a matter of human intellect, but rather divine illumination and listening, rather than rejecting truth. God must shine His light into darkness.** God must unstop ears so people can understand and believe.<sup>3</sup>

**The spiritual truths that the crowds could not understand without an openness to hear were now to be revealed to Jesus’ disciples.** Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah to explain the seriousness of rejecting God’s revelation of Himself.<sup>4</sup> The spiritually receptive receive deeper revelation and greater understanding of God’s truth. As an act of judgment, God conceals truth from those who oppose or remain indifferent to Him. This judgment is also gracious in that more truth only increases accountability. Jesus, the King, reveals divine secrets – kingdom realities – to those who yield to His rule and reign. God withholds further revelation from those who turn a deaf ear to the truth they encounter. As Jesus’ teaching became more veiled through His parables, the marginally interested pulled away. The spiritually receptive drew nearer to Him.

3: **Spiritual discernment:** 1 Corinthians 1:18-21; 2:9-16

4: **Isaiah’s prophecy:** Isaiah 6:9-10





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

**God holds each person responsible to respond to the spiritual light they are given.** Those who persist in rejecting Him do not receive more light. The blessedness awaiting those who hear and receive His message only increases, now and into eternity. The challenge for believers is to remain humbly receptive to God and His Word. The judgment of others should be left to God, who perfectly discerns the thoughts and intention of every human heart. The question is not whether God has removed light from someone who appears unresponsive. What matters is how you respond to the light you are given. Does your own heart continue to rejoice in truth? Do you remain pliable in God's hands?

## What Does This Parable Mean? – 13:18-23

Jesus clearly explained the details of this parable to His chosen followers. The deeper meaning Jesus revealed illustrated the truth He had just taught. **There will be varying responses to the message of Christ and His kingdom.** Some will believe and some will not. The individual response to Jesus' message, the gospel, makes an eternal difference. Those who truly receive God's Word produce a crop – life changes that reflect God's will.

This parable, often called the parable of the sower, may more accurately be described as the parable of the soils. **Jesus presented four types of soil into which the same sower threw the same seed.** The farmer represents Christ and His representatives, those who distribute the "seed" – the message of salvation. The only variable is the condition of the soil – the heart of the person who hears the gospel. The fruitfulness of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. People reject the gospel because of the condition of their hearts. The problem is not with the sower or the seed, but the soil.

**Roadside soil – 13:19:** The hardened dirt on the side of the road represents the individual who has consistently suppressed and rejected truth. The seed of truth cannot penetrate the crusty soil. A

hardened heart leaves this person vulnerable to Satan, the enemy who snatches away the truth. Continual rejection leads to a hard heart that remains unresponsive to God, conviction of sin, and the gospel.

**Rocky soil – 13:20-21:** A shallow layer of dirt on top of rock can produce an early burst of apparent life but no root system to sustain growth and fruit. This soil represents the individual who initially responds to the gospel with joy but gives up when facing the difficulties of daily life and following Christ. This is a superficial commitment to Christ, one willing to let go when the initial enthusiasm wears off. Hardship reveals the reality of the heart.

**Thorn-congested soil – 13:22:** This soil may be the most deceptive and dangerous of all. Thorns growing among the crop eventually choke out the life of the plant. This soil represents a divided heart – someone who loves this world's treasures and pleasures more than following Christ. The wealth and worries of this world gradually matter more than love for Christ.

**Good soil – 13:23:** This fourth soil represents the responsive heart that embraces Christ, believes the gospel, and bears fruit for God's kingdom. This person "hears" God's Word and "understands" it. This true and abiding faith always produces fruit, even though true Christians express varying degrees of fruitfulness. This variation in impact for God's kingdom depends on God's gifts and opportunities as well as personal surrender to the Holy Spirit's call to faith and obedience. In every degree of fruitfulness, God is glorified.

In this parable, only one soil represents true faith and commitment to Christ. What do believers today learn from this parable? **God's children are called to sow the seed of the gospel on all kinds of soil – to many places and to all kinds of people.** Our calling is not to define and diagnose other people's soil, but to seek to be the fruitful soil through which God can produce eternal fruit.





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

The parable speaks not to a particular moment in an individual's life but to their life response to God and the gospel. Will you keep sharing the truth, even with those who seem adverse to the gospel?

Even true believers often struggle with worldly cares and discouragement in hard times. These real-life issues do not drive a true believer from Jesus but to Him. God uses these challenges to deepen our roots of faith and produce fruit.

**People who receive Christ and His truth produce fruit that pleases God and lasts for eternity.** Those who reject Him, either in outright rebellion or gradual indifference, forfeit the mysteries of God's kingdom and fail to produce anything that lasts beyond this life. The goal of any crop is a harvest. Embracing the Word of God's kingdom is the priority. Only the fourth type of soil had success in this regard. God's assessment at the time of His harvest is what matters.

## God's Righteous Evaluation

### The Doctrine of the Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers

God knows everything about everyone – nothing is hidden from Him. **God assesses people with His perfect, unbiased truth.** This is unlike human courts that render a verdict based on circumstantial evidence and the testimony of flawed people (Matthew 10:26; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Hebrews 4:13). He cannot be fooled because He knows the hidden realities of every human heart.

**Every human who has ever lived has sinned and deserves God's just judgment.** This can go one of two ways. For those who trust in Christ for salvation, the judgment due their sin has already been paid by Jesus on the cross. Believers will face only an evaluation of their service to Christ while on earth (1 Corinthians 3:14; 15:58; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Unbelievers, on the other hand, carry the weight of their own sin before God. They face eternal punishment – a dreadful reality (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 20:15).

People who disregard the reality of final judgment before an all-knowing God think they can live without accountability. They are offended by the thought that God would send anyone to hell. They do not want their deeds exposed (John 3:20). **Dismissing the reality of God's righteous judgment does not make it less true.** When you ignore God's rightful place as the righteous judge, you put yourself in the Judge's seat. This is not wise.

Understanding God's certain judgment makes our sinful offenses against Him a serious matter. Grasping this reality increases our awe and wonder that Christ bore the judgment we rightfully deserve. **God's judgment establishes true worth and helps us distinguish between what is frivolous and what really matters.** Without an understanding that sin brings God's judgment, we are not properly motivated to share the gospel with others. In Christ, God both satisfied His holiness and met our greatest need. God, our righteous Judge, is indeed worthy of our praise!





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

## The Parable of the Weeds – Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

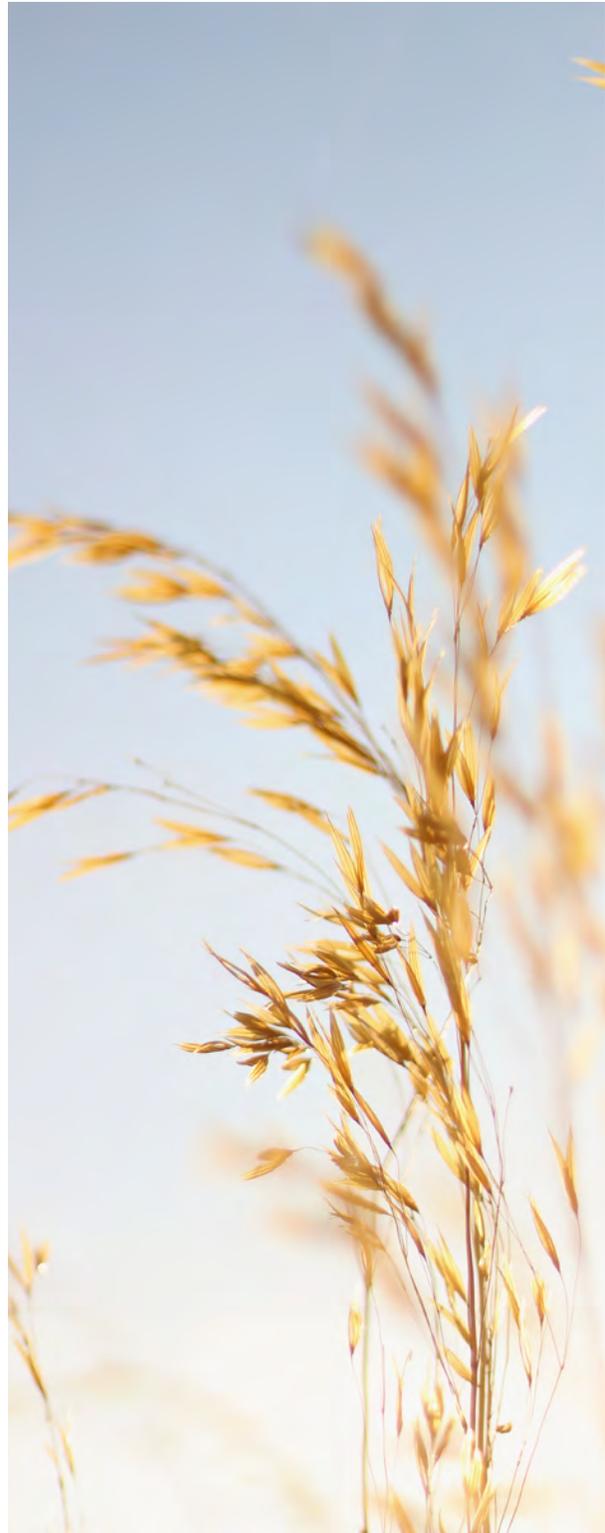
Jesus' hearers would have related to the realities of planting and harvesting, but the deeper spiritual principles in these first two parables in Matthew 13 were reserved for the receptive hearts of Jesus' disciples. The parable of the soils speaks of the reception of Jesus' message by a variety of people. **The parable of the weeds speaks of the deception of the enemy, who seeks to oppose truth by planting counterfeits.** Though Satan is an already defeated enemy, he continues to work against Christ and His Word. This parable helps us understand how Satan works until his ultimate downfall.

### Jesus Told the Parable to the Crowd – 13:24-30

Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. His enemy came while everyone was asleep and sowed weeds among his crop. **This sneak attack allowed the weeds and wheat to sprout together.** They looked almost identical. The owner's servants alerted him to the weeds, which he clearly recognized as the work of his enemy.

The servants wanted to pull the sprouting weeds from among the healthy wheat. The farmer did not allow this because he knew that some of the healthy wheat would be uprooted or damaged in the process. **Instead, he told his servants that the wheat and the weeds would grow together until the harvest day.** Then the difference would be obvious, and the wheat and the weeds could be separated. The weeds would be burned and the wheat harvest delivered into the barn.

Jesus' hearers would have been familiar with bearded darnel, a toxic weed that is similar in size and shape to wheat. **Enemies sometimes sowed this weed among another farmer's crop to sabotage his harvest.** This practice was common enough that Roman law specifically addressed this and required punishment for the crime.





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43



## Jesus Explained the Parable to His Disciples – 13:36-43

### The Disciples Seek the Hidden Insights – 13:36

Jesus' disciples asked Him privately to explain the parable. Jesus' explanation confirmed His priority to reveal deeper truth to the spiritually receptive and conceal it from the unbelieving (Matthew 13:10-17). **Jesus responded to the disciples' desire to understand truth and seek wisdom from Him.** This encourages all believers to have a heart that seeks to understand spiritual realities.

## The Symbolism Explained – 13:37-39

Jesus identified the symbols contained in His parable in a very straightforward manner before teaching the important lessons contained within His story. The sower is Jesus Himself, the "Son of Man." The field is the world. The good seed, or the wheat, are the people of His kingdom – believers. The weeds are the people of the "evil one." The enemy is the devil, Satan. The harvest is the end of the age, a time of judgment. The harvesters are angels.





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

## The Realities of the Harvest – 13:40-43

In this world, Satan seeks to oppose God's work and His people in every way possible. John 8:44 describes Satan as the devil, the father of lies. Lying is Satan's "native language." So then, it is no surprise that he seeks to counterfeit every good thing God does with a deceptive substitute to lead people astray. **In this parable, Satan plants his counterfeits in the world right alongside God's children.** This is indeed the case in every realm in which God's people operate in our world. In our churches, neighborhoods, workplaces, and families, the true and false are intermingled. Internal reality is camouflaged by an exterior that may appear acceptable. As mere humans, we often cannot tell the difference. But there is indeed an unavoidable distinction God judges with total accuracy.

**God will separate humanity into two distinct camps based on the spiritual reality that He judges perfectly.** In this parable, the field is the world, not the church. The gospel makes a claim on every life, whether they recognize it or not.

The harvest exposes the reality that Satan and his counterfeits try to hide. **At the end of the age, every human will stand accountable before God, who is never fooled.** There will be a separation of those who are truly God's people from the evil ones. People who have opposed God and rejected Christ will face eternal punishment. Jesus' description of this punishment is rather severe. Unbelievers will be thrown into the "blazing furnace" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Just as the owner's servants were discouraged from trying to prematurely judge and separate the

weeds from the wheat, believers must recognize their role while living in this world. **The primary calling of God's children is to plant seeds, not pull weeds.** Believers are compelled to exercise wise discernment, upholding truth and calling out error that opposes what God has clearly revealed. Because God can soften hard hearts and bring life from death, we must continue to spread the good news of His kingdom. These parables speak to God's assessment at the harvest, when people are held to a final account for their response to the gospel. We should not write off someone we determine to be a "weed" as unredeemable. A persecuting Saul can become a believing Paul. Final judgment is God's business, not ours.<sup>5</sup> While the distinction between God's people and Satan's people is not clear to us, God knows the difference. Satan loves to counterfeit the genuine work of God.

Verse 43 ends this explanation with deeply encouraging words for the "wheat," the people God has planted as His representatives in this world. **Even while living in a world blinded in darkness, "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."** The bright light of Jesus, reflected in His children, shines as a beacon into this world.<sup>6</sup> Our lives should bear fruit that confirms we are God's children. What fruit do you bear?

Jesus repeats His admonition, "Whoever has ears, let them hear." This invitation to open our spiritual ears to receive Jesus' message resonates across the centuries to us. We are called to tune our ears and seek reality apart from this world's counterfeits. Jesus' true followers receive God's truth by faith and bear fruit that proves their true identity. **God knows who truly follows Jesus and who does not.**

5: Judgment is God's: Luke 9:54-55

6: Believers shine: Daniel 12:3; Matthew 5:14-16





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

Jesus began to teach in parables to withhold truth from the people who were merely curious as well as those who opposed His message. Instead, He poured truth into His disciples and those willing to really hear as He called them to listen. He explained the deeper things others could not grasp. **In the parable of the soils, Jesus taught that the gospel is fruitful only in the hearts of people who receive the truth and are changed by it.** Many others will reject, ignore, and crowd out the eternally defining realities of His kingdom. The spiritually receptive are entrusted with more divine truth and bear lasting fruit evidenced by God's work in their lives.

**In the parable of the weeds, Jesus explained the reality of Satan's opposition to God's work and His people.** The enemy attempts to distort truth by placing people who follow the wrong ways among genuine believers. True believers must understand the reality of Satan's intentional sabotage of truth as they represent Christ in this fallen world. In a coming day of judgment, God will separate humanity into two camps. God is never confused; He knows His children by name. Those who live for Christ bring light into the dark world and receive God's abundant blessings.

### Apply It

How would you describe the soil of your heart? Even as believers, we encounter life experiences that threaten to harden us. We meet daily demands for our energy and focus. How can we be sure that our roots are deeply in Christ, not in this fleeting world? What keeps our hearts sensitive to God and His work in us and the world? True believers are infused with God's life and filled with His Spirit, which cannot be suppressed. Even when we fall prey to this world's distractions, God can be trusted to shake us often





# The Parables – Week One

Matthew 13:1-30, 36-43

enough and deeply enough to keep our eyes on Him. Spiritual disciplines such as confession of sin, daily contact with God through His Word and prayer, and enriching fellowship help us. We must live in humility and with keen awareness that we are “prone to wander.” We must be alert to Satan’s distractions and our foolish love of empty things. We must train our ears to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s impulses. **God can be trusted to remove the rocks of stubborn pride and weeds of distraction to keep our eyes on the prize, Christ Himself.** Lord, plow the soil of our hearts to keep us receptive and responsive to You!

Are you surprised that God’s work in you and through you constantly meets opposition? God is for you, but there is an enemy who is against you. Satan and this world offer a dazzling array of cheap substitutes for the rich spiritual blessings only God can supply. God calls His children to watchfulness and wariness regarding Satan’s schemes, but also to faith in God’s greater power. **A heart for God and growing understanding of His Word offers the best defense against the enemy’s counterfeits.** Personal internal awareness – honesty before God – is a great place to start. God is not fooled by anything; He already knows everything. He is trustworthy. He will help you discern reality and walk in genuine fruitfulness.

The power and wisdom are His. All He asks is that we follow Him. How will you trust God when His work in you meets opposition? What keeps you from being deceived and distracted?

A spiritual harvest day is coming. This unavoidable reality should impact our daily focus. **The fruit produced by our lives matters for eternity.** Your investment in Christ’s cause and eternal realities outranks the distractions of this life. Those who share God’s divine secrets will continue learning truth that knows no bounds for all eternity. People who live with a shallow or misguided approach to God stand in eternal peril. While the concept of coming judgment is neither pleasant nor popular, this focus helps you maintain balance since what you can touch and taste here on earth can seem more real than what matters to God. How do spiritual realities – both the promised blessings and the sobering truth – impact the way you interact with the people around you? Will you ask God for a healthy perspective on the coming harvest day? How does He want you to grow? Will you be a sower of truth? What you believe and testify to and how you live offers visible proof of what you believe. Will the harvest reveal the fruit that the seed planted in you was designed to produce?



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# WEEK TWO

MATTHEW 13:31-35, 44-58



## Focus Verse

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

Matthew 13:44



# The Parables – Week Two

Matthew 13:31-35, 44-58

## Day 1

1. Use this space to record how you have seen God's activity during the week. How has He provided, answered, comforted, restored, guided, etc.?
2. What from the notes, lecture, group sharing, or personal study impacted you most in the past week?

## Day 2: Matthew 13:31-35

*Jesus taught the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast.*

3. a. To what did Jesus compare the mustard seed and yeast?  
  
b. What is the common concept or idea in these two parables?
4. What possible interpretations do you see? (See also Matthew 16:6-12; Ezekiel 17:23-24; Leviticus 2:11, 23:15-18; and 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.)
5. a. Jesus continued to speak in parables and did not always interpret them. Why would He do this?  
  
b. Understanding spiritual truth can be challenging. How did you benefit from wrestling with these two parables? How will these benefits impact your future study of Scripture?

## Day 3: Matthew 13:44-46

*Jesus taught the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl.*

6. a. What are the similarities and differences in these two parables?

Similarities: \_\_\_\_\_

Differences: \_\_\_\_\_





# The Parables – Week Two

Matthew 13:31-35, 44-58

- b. What is the common concept or idea in these two parables?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 7. a. Again, interpretations of these parables vary. What possible interpretation do you see? (See Philippians 3:8; Colossians 2:2-3; Psalms 16:5-6; 135:4; and Romans 8:32.)  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. What conclusion seems most helpful or reasonable to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 8. How are you personally encouraged by these thoughts?

## Day 4: Matthew 13:47-50

*Jesus taught the parable of the net.*

- 9. Explain the parable of the net.

The net: \_\_\_\_\_

The good fish: \_\_\_\_\_

The bad fish: \_\_\_\_\_

The fishermen: \_\_\_\_\_

The outcomes for both types of fish: \_\_\_\_\_

- 10. a. What similarities do you see between Matthew 13:37-43 and 13:47-50?  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. How do people respond to both the warnings and encouragements in Scripture? Why are both important?  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. When has a warning in God's Word helped you?





## Matthew 13:31-35, 44-58

### Focus Verse

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” – Matthew 13:44

- The Growth of Christ’s Kingdom – Matthew 13:31-35
- The Value of Christ’s Kingdom – Matthew 13:44-46
- The Response to Christ’s Kingdom – Matthew 13:47-58

### Engage

How do you incorporate God’s priorities into your world when daily life demands so much? Relationships and routine responsibilities require our constant focus. A good deal of energy is invested in daily duties like eating, sleeping, working, cleaning, and communicating. The noise of daily life often drowns out God’s voice. What helps you see beyond fleeting and fast-paced moments in a fallen world? **It is important that the truth about God’s present rule and coming reign permeates your day-to-day life.** The realities of God’s kingdom are not just eternal truths that are interesting to study; they impact life today. Although Jesus is an unexpected King, the truth that He is King transforms the way believers live.

In Matthew 13, Jesus teaches about His kingdom through a series of parables. His veiled presentation revealed deeper teaching to those who believed while concealing truth from those who did not believe. Jesus explained the first two parables. The rest of the parables in this chapter are a bit harder to understand. Bible students interpret these teachings in different ways. The meaning lies beneath the surface with a main lesson emerging from each parable. Just as the truths about God’s kingdom are hidden in this present world, God uses challenging passages like these to draw His people to seek Him and His kingdom “secrets” more intimately.<sup>1</sup> **Nothing in this life is more important than Christ and His kingdom.** Will you allow these kingdom secrets to impact your daily life?

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<sup>1</sup>: Kingdom secrets: Deuteronomy 29:29; Matthew 13:11-12

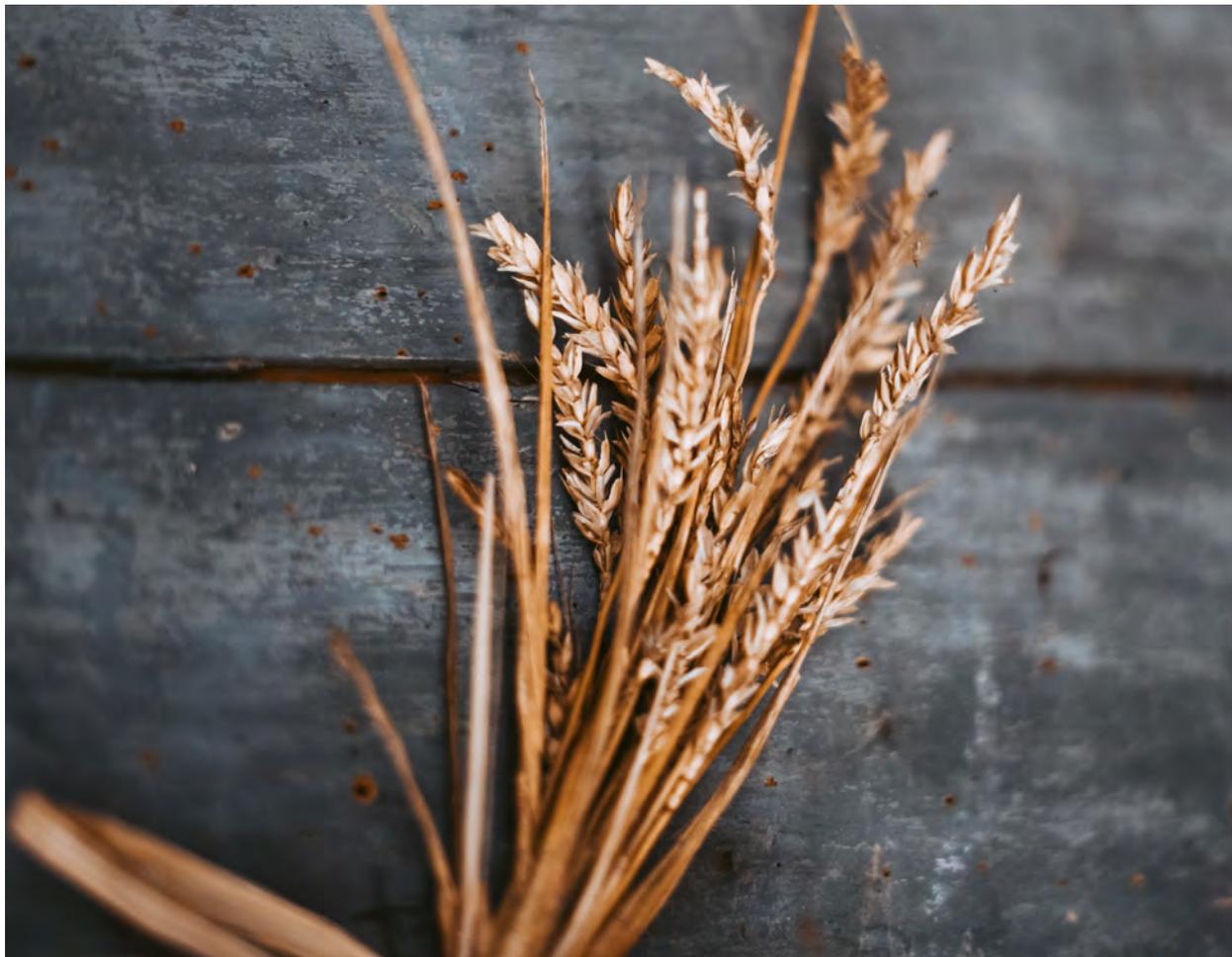


# The Growth of Christ's Kingdom – Matthew 13:31-35

In the previous lesson, the parable of the soils (13:1-23) teaches that the condition of the “soil” of people’s hearts determines their response to Christ’s message. And the parable of the weeds (13:24-30, 36-43) teaches that Satan opposes and counterfeits God’s work and that a coming “harvest” will separate true believers from unbelievers. The remaining six parables in this lesson can be grouped in pairs to offer more lessons about Christ’s kingdom. **Each couplet of parables presents a central concept, but sometimes two opposing but reasonable interpretations exist.** The parables Matthew recorded combine to uphold the infinite worth of Christ and His kingdom.

## Two Parables – One Concept

Jesus offered two illustrations of the kingdom of heaven. He first compared His kingdom to a tiny mustard seed that grows into a shrub so large that birds come and perch in its branches. He then also gave the example of a small amount of yeast that is worked into a large amount of flour and permeates the dough. **In both parables, something very small and insignificant made a disproportionately huge impact.** A very small seed produces growth that seems abnormal – far beyond what would be expected. A relatively small addition of yeast has an infiltrating impact on the dough.





## The Parables – Week Two

Matthew 13:31-35, 44-58



Two interpretations for these two illustrations – one negative and one positive – have been offered. The positive interpretation sees the unexpected, exponential growth being that of the gospel and God’s kingdom. From small and insignificant beginnings, the infiltrating influence of Christ’s Church reaches beyond the Jews to the entire world. With Ezekiel 17:23-24 in mind, the birds that nest in the tree’s branches are seen to represent people from Gentile nations who find a place of refuge in Christ. **The message of this interpretation is that the work and purposes of God are underestimated and unstoppable.**

A second view sees the growth as the unrelenting opposition of Satan, whose constant infiltration of false doctrine and fake disciples causes superficial growth. Satan continually opposes the expansion of Christ’s kingdom. However, the context of this passage about Jesus’ unstoppable kingdom suggests the positive interpretation. **From small beginnings, Christ’s kingdom will grow to worldwide influence.**

So how do we correctly interpret the parables Jesus did not explain? Challenging passages like this should not be avoided or dismissed as too difficult to understand. As believers, even with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we struggle

at times to fully comprehend spiritual truth. The width, depth, and breadth of divine truth exceeds the capacity of our minds. God honors a heart that prayerfully seeks to understand His Word. We should always approach the Bible with humility and a desire to meet God and learn from Him. The context of Scripture – both surrounding passages and the Bible as a whole – must be considered. It is okay not to fully grasp everything we read in the Bible. **Often, we struggle more with what we cannot fully understand than we seek to apply what we do understand.**

In these parables, it is possible to see both encouragement and warning. God works in ways that defy human logic. He chooses and uses people and situations in ways we do not expect in order to display His power. **God’s work and His kingdom will not be stopped, despite human limitations or satanic opposition.**

**In verses 34 and 35, Matthew emphasized again that from this point on, Jesus spoke only in parables to the curious crowds in Galilee.** He reminded his readers that Jesus’ teaching through parables fulfilled prophecy recorded in Psalm 78:2, “I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old.”



## The Value of Christ's Kingdom – Matthew 13:44-46

### Two Parables – One Concept

These two parables make the same basic point in two ways. Both illustrate someone finding something of great worth. In the first parable, a man happens upon a valuable treasure hidden in a field. He hides it again and sells everything he has to buy the field. In the second parable, a merchant goes in active pursuit of fine pearls. He finds a pearl of exceeding value and sells everything he has to buy it. **In both parables, something extremely valuable is discovered, desired, and purchased.**

**Christ and the kingdom of God are treasures of incomparable worth.** In the parable of the hidden treasure, the man is not actively seeking the treasure, just as no one truly seeks God on their own.<sup>2</sup> In the parable of the pearl, the merchant finds the treasure after a long quest. In both parables, the seeker sells everything they have to buy the treasured possession. The gospel is offered freely to all who believe, but believers are called to

give up everything to follow Christ. The apostle Paul expressed this well in Philippians 3:8, “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.”

**The Bible speaks of God as the believer's treasure *and*, astonishingly, the believer as God's treasure.** Nothing in your life matters more than Jesus. And you matter to Him. What words adequately express the depth of the Father's love? He sought us and redeemed us. He did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up to death for the sake of His children.<sup>3</sup>

The Bible presents parallel truths which at first can seem contradictory. We seek God only to discover that He first sought us. **We learn that Jesus paid the costly price for us and made Himself the greatest prize any person could ever seek.** God considered us worth seeking *and He is the ultimate treasure we can seek.*

2: No one seeks God: Romans 3:11

3: God's Son not spared: Romans 8:32





## The Reign and Rule of Christ

### The Doctrine of the Kingdom of God

Jesus' parables in Matthew 13 teach important truths about God's kingdom. What do we mean when we speak of the kingdom of God? This important theme appears throughout the Bible. Phrases such as the "kingdom of heaven" and other synonyms appear over 60 times in the Gospels. God rules over everything – past, present, and future. You may ask, "If God is King and in control, why doesn't it look that way when I watch the news and observe the world?" Sin and opposition to God are evident everywhere. To put it bluntly, the kingdom of God is hard to see in today's world. Jesus is an unexpected and surprising king in so many ways. Here is the hope: **God has promised that one day He will establish His kingdom and reign without rival.** When He returns, everyone will recognize Jesus as King.

**For now, God is building His kingdom in the lives of people who receive Jesus as King.** God has established a visible kingdom now on earth, the realm where God's Spirit resides and offers a preview of what is to come. This visible kingdom makes a claim on every human created in God's image. The challenge for those who submit to God and are a part of His visible kingdom is that the world system does not recognize God's rule and authority over their lives. This preview believers experience of what *will be* someday helps God's people live *as it should be* today, by faith and in humble submission to God.<sup>4</sup> The kingdom of God is moving forward to accomplish God's plan on His schedule. For now, believers recognize that Jesus Christ, who will reign forever and ever, reigns in their hearts.

**People reject Christ or fail to surrender to Him because they prefer to rule over their own lives.** They fear giving up the control they imagine they have because they fail to understand the truth about God. They do not see God, their Creator, as the One to whom they will give an account for their lives. They think God's goal is to limit their freedom and pursuit of pleasure. God's rule is rejected in favor of a delusion of self-rule by those who do not face the fact that they cannot even control their next heartbeat. People who reject God remain accountable to Him and will one day "discover" His inescapable rule. Christ's kingdom has a claim on them they do not understand. Satan has deceived people to believe they can live independent of God and not deal with Him. This is a lie. Failure to believe that God is the wise, just, and loving ruler of creation, humanity, and eternity is to reject the only true stability in this life.

The kingship of Christ and the kingdom of God represent a place of safety and flourishing for God's child. You can trust God to reign over you with kindness, righteousness, and good will. God will lead you to fruitfulness in this life and eternal blessings.<sup>5</sup> His rule is not to be feared but treasured. The eternal victory promised within God's kingdom provides context for the cares in this life. **Those who surrender to Christ and seek His kingdom find Him to be a wise and faithful King.** The blessings of God's kingdom are not delayed for future delivery in eternity. Believers who follow Christ experience many blessings today.<sup>6</sup> Do you value God's kingdom and the wonderful security of living with Christ as your King?

4: Faith in a glorious future: Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 John 3:2-3

5: Spiritual flourishing: Psalm 84:11; Ephesians 1:3-10

6: Abundant blessings: John 10:10; Romans 8:32





# The Response to Christ's Kingdom – Matthew 13:47-58

**The last two parables in Matthew 13 add even more rich teaching about God's kingdom.** The parable of the net returns to the subject of coming judgment. The parable of the house owner offers a beautiful challenge to Jesus' followers regarding the kingdom secrets He has revealed. This chapter ends with a picture of people who refuse the treasures of Christ's kingdom – the skeptics in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth.

## The Parable of the Net – 13:47-51

### The Parable

**This parable has a similar theme to the parable of the weeds, with a focus on the separation of believers and unbelievers at the end of the age.** Unlike the other parables, Jesus presented this

story and its spiritual meaning together. Jesus' hearers would be familiar with fishermen's use of a dragnet. This method of fishing involved casting a large net that dragged all kinds of fish to the shore. The desirable fish would then be separated from the undesirable fish. Under Old Testament food laws, certain fish were considered clean and others unclean, inedible, and worthless.

### The Interpretation of the Parable

Like the other parables, Jesus clearly indicated that this teaching was about the kingdom of heaven. A time of judgment is coming. **On a still future day, the "full" net of humanity will be pulled to the shore of eternity to stand before God.** Christ's kingdom has a claim on everyone, whether or not they accept the gospel





## The Parables – Week Two

Matthew 13:31-35, 44-58

by faith. Those who do not positively respond to the gospel do not escape the claim that God's kingdom has on them. God knows who belongs to Him and who does not. A harvest day is coming when everyone will be judged by God's standards, not their own. This is inescapable.

The angels are the fishermen who separate the fish. The good fish are put in baskets and the bad ones are thrown away. The bad fish represent anyone and everyone who does not respond to Jesus and receive Him as Savior.



These people have no part in God's kingdom and await eternal punishment. The descriptions of hell – here and in other parts of Scripture – are frightening. Unbelievers will be thrown into the “blazing furnace” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”<sup>7</sup> Gnashing teeth usually represent anger as unbelievers will remain eternally furious at God for bringing the punishment they deserve. Though these truths are devastating for anyone to acknowledge, the seriousness of rejecting God's mercy and Christ's sacrifice is clear. The Bible offers repeated warnings about the reality of hell and eternal punishment. This grave certainty underscores the amazing rescue Jesus offers. **Your response to Christ determines your eternal destiny.**

When Jesus finished this explanation, He asked the disciples if they understood His teaching. They said they did. Though their grasp of these kingdom realities was growing, there was much they did not yet understand. The coming days would make these truths come alive before their own eyes. We need to realize that our grip on eternal truth is limited, as did the disciples back then. **Our responsibility is to believe and act on what we do understand and to continue to seek deeper truth.** God reveals enough truth to call us to faith and invites us into a joy-filled redeemed life now.

### The Parable of the House Owner – 13:52

What is our responsibility with what God has revealed about His kingdom? Are God's riches just for our personal enjoyment? This parable tells us that every teacher of the law who has become a disciple is like a houseowner who has been entrusted with old and new treasures. The riches of Christ and His kingdom are not to be left in a dusty storeroom but brought out to be celebrated and shared with others. **Christians are responsible to proclaim and obey what they understand.**

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7: Eternal punishment: Matthew 24:51; 25:30, 46; Luke 16:22-24





# The Parables – Week Two

Matthew 13:31-35, 44-58

## The Parables of Matthew 13

These parables all explain some aspect of God's kingdom throughout this present age.

**The soils:** The heart (soil) of the hearer brings different responses to the gospel message.

**The weeds:** God allows counterfeits to mix in with Christians in the world and to grow alongside His own people. The difference will be clear at the end of the age, when God separates believers from unbelievers.

**The mustard seed and yeast:** Jesus foretells the tremendous expansion of His kingdom.

**The hidden treasure and pearl:** The Lord places intense value on His children, *and* Jesus Christ is the matchless treasure that surpasses anything else we could seek in this world.

**The net of fish:** At the end of time, God will bring judgment. All people are either “good fish” or “bad fish.” A day of separation is coming. Only those who treasure Christ are safe.

**The house owner:** Jesus' disciples have the privilege and responsibility to share with others the old and new treasures of Christ's kingdom that God has given to them.

What are the old and new treasures? Jesus' teaching was built upon God's revelation to His people. He came to fulfill the Old Testament teaching, ceremonies, and symbols. Jesus illuminated new treasures of truth as He taught about His kingdom. His disciples were being called to teach these truths to others. We know they did, as they later went out to evangelize, wrote the Gospels, and recorded these kingdom truths. **God's Word contains old promises and new realities that are tied to His kingdom.** The treasures God has entrusted to us are not exclusively for our own benefit. Stewardship of God's riches means we must bless others by sharing what we know of Him.

### The Peril of Unbelief – 13:53-58

**When Jesus finished teaching these parables, He returned to His hometown of Nazareth.** He went to the synagogue and began to teach. The people there were amazed by His teaching and miracles. Jesus offered indisputable evidence of His deity and authority.

**Though these people recognized Jesus as a wonder-worker, they could not accept Him as Messiah.** For those who had known Jesus' family

and perhaps even Jesus as a boy who grew up in their midst, He was simply too ordinary – too unexpected. Their familiarity with Jesus blinded them to His unique identity. They were perplexed by His power but unwilling to see Him as anyone but a hometown boy. Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.”

Unbelief blinds people to spiritual realities. Refusal to believe the truths about Jesus is costly. In fact, it leads to eternal death. Believing and following Christ brings untold treasures in this life and for all time. Jesus taught eternal certainties that people with open hearts believed while others remained steeled in unbelief and at risk for eternal peril. Life in Nazareth then and life in your city today offers distractions that crowd out the things of God. Truth about Jesus and His kingdom is unlike any other fact we know in this created world. Our response not only sets our course in this life, it is also a matter of life or death for all time. **Nothing in this life is more important than Christ and His kingdom.**





## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

Jesus taught eternal truth that only believers could understand and accept. His parables withheld deeper truth from those who were merely curious or skeptical, both as an act of judgment and grace. **He revealed that His unstoppable kingdom would encounter opposition but prevail and grow in ways that defy logic.** Believers are to look different than the world as we show the goodness God has planted within us. The faithful minority who accept Him and join His kingdom cause will seek and find worth in this life that surpasses anything else. Christ's love for and sacrifice on behalf of His children demonstrates their value to Him. While living in a physical world, spiritual realities matter. People who avoid or reject God and His truth in this life will enter eternity as God's enemies – a frightful and final destiny.

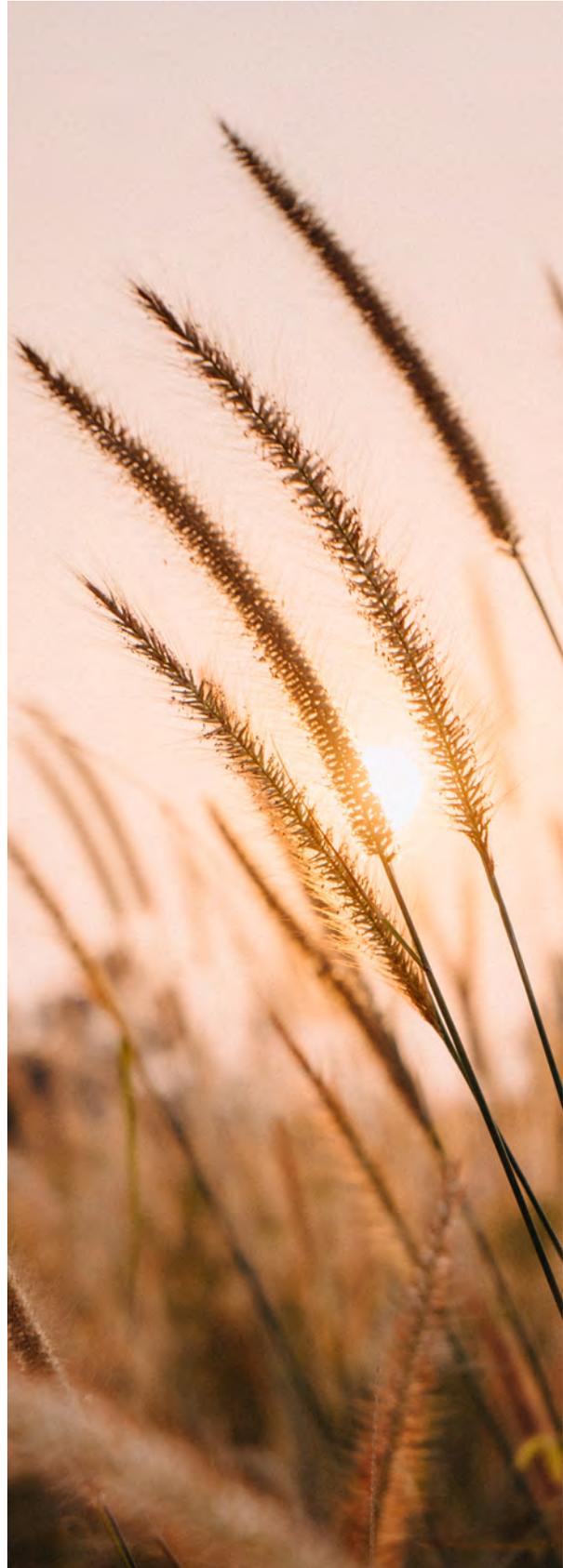
God's intimate and accurate assessment of every human heart assures that He knows His children by name. The warnings and encouragement contained in Jesus' parables continue to speak today. This world cherishes what will rot, fade, and be destroyed. Only eternal treasure will remain.<sup>8</sup> **Jesus called His disciples and calls us to believe the truth and build our lives on His eternal realities.** Like the disciples, we are to acknowledge and commit to what we do understand, which is enough to change our lives forever. Believers will experience an abundant rich life now and spend eternity basking in the infinite truth and eternal worship of Jesus. This is the greatest treasure that can ever be known.

### Apply It

The gospel, the good news of Christ, is simultaneously simple and profound. The rich truths of God's kingdom can be taught to children but are inexhaustible to biblical scholars

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8: Eternal treasure: Psalm 16:11; Matthew 6:20; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 Peter 1:3-5





## The Parables – Week Two

Matthew 13:31-35, 44-58

even with years of study. As we mature in Christ, we should learn to digest not just the elementary truths of God's Word but also solid food – deeper and more challenging teaching.<sup>9</sup> Did you find Jesus' parables challenging? Both understanding and accepting their meaning is certainly hard. The realities about coming judgment can be tough to accept. Will you ask God to develop within you an appetite for His truth, even if that truth stretches your understanding? When you struggle to understand Scripture, will you pray and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the truth? Are you willing to put in time and effort to study the Bible with diligence? **The Word of God speaks the truth of God to the people of God by the power of the Spirit of God.** As we grow to maturity, we live with different values and priorities.

God invests in you as you study the Bible and interact with His people. As your experience with God's faithfulness and truth increases, your responsibility to steward His investment in you grows as well. **The treasures God gives you are not just for you.** We sometimes take the consumer mentality of the world into our Christianity. Feasting on God's blessings but failing to pour out into others causes us to grow spiritually fat, but not faithful. What new and old treasures has God placed in your "storeroom"? Are you bringing out those treasures and

sharing with others the rich investment God has deposited in you? Do you know and appreciate old and new promises that God makes to you? Do you realize how much treasure you have?<sup>10</sup> What will you do with what you have learned this week?

Every day you wake to new opportunities. Each morning you likely face a list of work to do and people to see. As a Christian bound for eternity but living in today, how do you keep Christ and His kingdom in constant view? The deeper truths of life are often undervalued in a fast-paced world with incessant demands. How often do you stop to remember that this physical life is not all there is – that the most important things are not what you can touch, see, and purchase? You are part of a people who are connected to one another by a living and vibrant faith in the true King. This connection transcends this world and national identities. Christ's kingdom involves citizenship in heaven, joined with multitudes of people from many times and nations with whom we will share eternity.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Jesus' parables have been a call to wake up and see beyond today's agenda. **Seeking Christ's kingdom is worth whatever it costs.** Will you allow God to recalibrate your mind daily, so you value what He values? Will you continue to pursue spiritual growth in your attitudes and actions to enhance your life?

9: Solid food: Hebrews 5:12-14

10: Believer's treasure: Ephesians 1:15-23; 2:4-10

11: Eternal citizenship: Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 7:9-10



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