Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Kingdom Parables, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 13:3a, 10-17, 34, 35
Code: 2298

Let's look together at the Word of God, the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel. As we approach Matthew 13, we're really approaching one of the monumental chapters in all of the pages of Holy Scripture. We endeavored last Lord's day to introduce to you some of the truth that helps us understand the chapter. And this morning, we're going to continue in a rather introductory overview and then beginning next Lord's Day, look at specifics as we consider the parables of this great chapter.

The preacher in Ecclesiastes said, "Of the making of many books, there is no end." If any generation in the world ever understood that, we do. The volumes are beyond belief. And more and more are printed and published everyday.

And even as Christians, we're very much aware that there are thousands upon thousands of books being published today on the church. The church is being studied, scrutinized, analyzed, blamed, praised, exalted, damned, criticized, shored up, programs, methods, means and modes of all imaginations are being applied to the church, discussions about the church go on everywhere from the back room to the board room, from the kitchen to the seminary classroom, among laymen, among pastors, theologians, and even among the people of the world. The church is a tremendously important thing. And we're all striving to understand Christianity in our time. And how to make the church what God wants it to be. We've been meeting all week with the pastors here at our Shepherd's Conference and we've been trying to get a better understanding of the church and a better understanding of how it is that we must minister in the church and serve the Lord of the church... Jesus Christ.

And all of that is noble. But all noble effort to understand the church must begin at one key point in the New Testament and that, I believe, to be the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. I believe we have here, the analysis of the church age from the viewpoint of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. This is the real opening of the biblical presentation of the church of Jesus Christ and in it our Lord discusses the nature, qualities of this period of time that we know as the church age. It is a marvelously prophetic chapter. The Lord talks about things that are going to come to pass in the church age. And so, it is tremendously important for us to understand this chapter, because this is the age in which we live and work and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And we must understand the nature of this age.

Now, remember that Matthew has presented Jesus Christ as King. He has shown us beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is the anointed of God, the Messiah, the Christ, the King, the Savior of the world. He has come to bring His kingdom. John the Baptist said He would bring a Kingdom. Jesus did what John said he would, He offered a kingdom. He talked of the kingdom. He taught of the kingdom. And He called people to acknowledge Him as the King.

However, by the time you reach Matthew 13, they have rejected the King and they have refused His kingdom. And so we are at a monumental point in redemptive history. The people of God called out of the loins of Abraham, who were to be the channel through whom the world would be blessed, who are the channel through whom the kingdom would come and by whose King it would be ruled, these people have refused the King. And they have refused His kingdom. And so, as we come to chapter 13, the kingdom is postponed. The kingdom cannot come when the people of the King refuse the King. And so, the kingdom is postponed to a future time, a later time, a time when the people of Israel will accept the King, will acknowledge His kingdom and thereby receive it in its fullness.

The time, then, between the rejection and the return is a time that we call the mystery form of the kingdom. Because it is a time hidden from all generations past. In verse 11 of chapter 13, Jesus calls it the mystery, that's His term. We have, then, intervening between the rejection of Christ and the return of Christ to set up His kingdom, a period that has never been described in all of revelatory history. No one has ever known the details of this period of time, until chapter 13 and Jesus gives us the first description. That description is built upon throughout the remainder of the New Testament, but this is where it all begins.

Now, just to give you a little idea of how the Old Testament sees this mystery period, turn with me to the twelfth chapter of the prophecy of Zechariah. And this will serve as an illustration to us of the fact that indeed this period is a mystery. In Zechariah chapter 12 and 13 and 14, we find theword concerning the conversion of Israel and the establishment of the great kingdom of the Lord, but there are several details within that that I want you to note. Chapter 12 verse 10, "And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications and they shall look upon Me, whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning."

Now, what is this saying? It's saying that there's going to come a day when the people of Israel will look upon the one they pierced, and that speaks of the crucifixion, and they will mourn that they ever did that. And they will be bitter that they ever did that. Now that tells us that when the King came, He would be rejected. He would be pierced. Psalm 22 tells us the same thing. Isaiah 53 again tells us the same thing. There would be a piercing; there would be a rejection, a crucifixion. But later a mourning over that. But Zechariah, the Psalmist, Isaiah say nothing about the time in between. When the mourning comes though, verse 1 of chapter 13 says, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to

the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." When they look on the one they havepierced, they mourn in bitterness, they're sorry for their sin of rejecting the King and His kingdom, then God will pour out the fountain of salvation upon them.

And then chapter 14 tells us in verse 4, "And His feet shall in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in its midst toward the east and toward the west and there shall be a very great valley and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north and half toward the south." This is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, splitting open the hillside there, the Mount of Olives.

Then it says in verse 9, "And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord and His name one."

Now, what do we see? Zechariah says there will be a piercing, there will be a killing, there will be a rejection. And the prophet saw that. And they even saw a resurrection. And later on a mourning on the part of the people of God...and then a salvation of the people of God, and then the establishment of the kingdom. But the one thing they never saw was what happens between the rejection and the mourning, what happens between the refusal to receive the King and the time they will receive the King. That is the mystery period, hidden from all generations past, never discussed in the pages of holy writ, until Jesus opens our understanding here in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. And now we have that part of redemptive history that's known as the parenthesis, the interregnum or the interim, filled up in our understanding by the words of ourLord.

Now, let's go back to Matthew 13 with that in mind. And you can imaginehow important it is that Matthew 13 be where it is. Anyone reading the gospel of Matthew, anyone moving along in the account of Jesus Christ, seeing Him come as the King and seeing Him refused and His kingdom refused, is immediately going to ask the question - What happens now? And if the kingdom is postponed until a future time, when the people of the King will receive the King and the kingdom will then come, what happens in the meantime? And that is precisely the question answered by the series of parables in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. Each parable describes a particular facet of this period in which we now live known as the mystery form of the kingdom.

Now, we could also say that this is the church age, that's just another term for the same period of time. It will end when Jesus takes the church out, as it began when He called the church into being.

Now, as we look at Matthew 13, 1 want to give you, this morning, just a general overview and a sense of what's going on in the mind of our Lord as He teaches here. Three points that I want you to note".' the plan, the purpose and the promise. And I think these three will help us to get a grasp of this great chapter. First is the plan, verse 3. "And He spoke many things unto them in parables."

The plan of our Lord was to speak in parables. A very important reason was in His mind as we shall see in our second point. But let's discuss that plan. It says at the beginning of verse 3 that He spoke many things. And I believe that all of the parables here in this chapter were spoken at one time, on this very occasion, the very day that He left the house and went to the seashore and the multitude gathered and He went out offshore in a little boat, that very occasion was the occasion in which He gave these parables.

It is possible that the parables included in the other gospels were also given on that day and Matthew does not include them all. It is even possible that He taught beyond what is recorded in Holy Writ, but nonetheless He spoke many things.

Now, He only spoke those things in parables. It says in verse 34, "All these things spoke Jesus unto the multitude in parables and without a parable spoke He not unto them." He spoke to them in parables and only in parables. Listen carefully, He did not even explain the parables to the multitudes, He only spoke, it says in verse 34, unto the multitude in parables.

Now, what is a parable? Parabole, it really means parameaning along side, it means to lay something along side something else...to place something along side something else so that a comparison can be made. That's basically what it came to mean...a comparison or an illustration. You have a spiritual truth that may be hard to be understood, you lay along side of it a physical, earthly story which gives understanding to that spiritual truth. That is a parable.

The term paraboleis used in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, 45 times. Which indicates to us that it was a very common form of Jewish teaching. It is an extended comparison. It is taking something very, very external, very observable, very objective, very earthly and laying it along side something spiritual, supernatural, heavenly and subjective so that one helps you to understand the other. I guess you could sum it up by saying it's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. That is a parable. And any good teacher knows that you must communicate to people in terms of parables, you must communicate to people in terms of analogies to life, you cannot just talk in the supernatural dimension or in abstraction, you must draw along side those theological concepts and spiritual concepts that which is concrete and earthy so that they can understand the more difficult from that which is readily understood.

And so, Jesus, here, teaches profound spiritual lessons about a period of time no one ever knew about and He does it in the most simple terminology so that those whom He wishes to understand can understand very easily. He uses a field. He uses grain. He uses birds, and a road and thorns and the sun and wheat and tares and mustard seeds and a tree and leaven and a treasure, and a pearl. And He talks about a net, and He talks about a householder. Those are all very, very common terms to those people in their agrarian and agricultural life style.

And just as a footnote, at this juncture, this is the most prominent method of our Lord's teaching. In fact, most people feel when they thing about the teaching of Jesus that He just normally taught in parables. But interestingly enough, though it is most commonly associated with Him, it was not His exclusive method of teaching. But whenever He taught, He used life situations though they may not have been fully extended to be parables. For example, Matthew 13 is the first time in the New Testament that we run across a parable. But all throughout Jesus teaching prior to this, recorded in Matthew, He gave them graphic analogies. For example, in chapter 5 He said men were to be in the world like salt and light. That's teaching by analogy. In chapter 6 He talked about the kingdom of God and He talked about how important it was to perceive the birds and the lilies of the field in relationship to how you sought the kingdom of God. In chapter 7 He talked about a wise builder and a foolish builder. He talked about a foundation of sand and a foundation of rock. He talked about building a structure. In chapter 9 He talked about garments and He talked about putting wine in certain kinds of wineskins, as illustrations of spiritual truth. In chapter 11 He talked about children playing in the marketplace as illustrative of certain spiritual responses.

All of those, in a sense, are embryos of parables, they are all talking in pictures, but now that technique of our Lord is fully extended into a full range story with many parts in which He conveys spiritual truth. All good teachers use that kind of technique.

Now, let me tell you why parables are effective, and I'll give you four reasons. First of all, because they make truth concrete. They make truth concrete. By that I mean most people think in pictures and they take abstract concepts and make pictures out of them. We may not understand the concept of spreading the gospel, but we do understand it when we see a man throwing seed in a field. They make truth... they objectify truth and make it concrete.

Secondly, they therefore make truth portable. And by that I mean that if you remember the story and you carry the story in your mind, you can always recover its spiritual meaning because all of the elements are there in the story. And so they allow truth to be carried away.

Thirdly, they make truth interesting. They reduce it from a rather dull sort of ethereal thoughts down to life situations that carry interest and grab our attention.

And fourthly, they make truth personally discoverable. In other words, as the story goes, you begin to eternalize the spiritual truth and see it in the story so that you internalize that truth yourself. So, parables are a marvelous mode of teaching because they make truth concrete, portable, interesting and personally discoverable. And thus our Lord spoke in parables ... as the Hebrews commonly did, they used the term mashalto speak of their parabolic teaching.

Now, the Lord then is going to use parables, that's His plan. And as you begin to look at the chapter, you see a sequence of parables. Let me just briefly introduce you to these parables ... and as I basically describe the parable without reading the details, I want to draw out of it the truth that Jesus is teaching in each parable. And you will see the description of the church age, the first time it is ever described from the viewpoint of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the first parable occurs from verse 5, 4 or 5, right on through verse 23. And it is a parable about a sower and a seed. He went into the fields and he sowed the seed. Now this is depicting the preaching of the gospel throughout the world. Some people will initially reject it, stony ground. Some people will initially receive it but the thorns or the sun will cause them to fall away. Some people will initially receive it and ultimately bring forth fruit. What is the Lord saying? Simply this, the gospel will be preached throughout the world; some will hear it and reject, some will hear it and accept for awhile and fall away, some will hear it and believe and bring forth fruit. A very simple principle, we'll never win the whole world.

I don't think some people yet understand that. We will never win the whole world.

The second parable, in verses 24 to 30, is a parable of the wheat and the tares ... a field, wheat is sown in the field, while, the workers sleep, the enemy comes and sows tares which look exactly like wheat and they crowd the wheat and ruin the crop but you can't pull them out because you can't tell them from the wheat, so you have to let them alone until the harvest. And what is the Lord saying about this period of time? He is saying there will be true believers and false believers. There will be people within the identification of the kingdom, people saying they belong, people moving along with the rest who are the genuine, who will be false. And ultimately God will barn the true and burn the false.

And what is the principle? We will never purge the church. Throughout the period of the kingdom, we're going to have the true and the false side by side...coexisting until judgment. So, we're not shocked when we find out that there are unbelievers in the church.

Third parable is given in verse 31 and 32 and it's a parable about a mustard seed which is one of the smallest of all the seeds and it was planted in the ground and it bloomed and became a huge tree, so big that birds could come and live in it. That means it had big, huge branches to support birds. It wasn't just a bush, as a mustard seed normally would produce a very small bush and the point here is that the church age will begin with a very small beginning, very small. And yet it will grow to massive proportions, big enough to be a haven for birds.

What does that say? That the kingdom will begin small and it will become world-wide. It will become wide spread and influential and all kinds of things are going to live in its branches.

The fourth parable is in verses 33 and 34, and it likens the kingdom to leaven, which was used in making bread to make it rise. And leaven speaks of influence ... primarily the influence of worldliness. When the people of Israel were told to leave Egypt, they were told only to have unleavened bread because when you leaven bread you take a lump from a past loaf, and you pull it out, put it in the next batch and that leavens that batch. You pull a lump out of that for the next batch, so that every loaf is leavened by the prior loaf. And when God said you're going out of Egypt, He said - I don't want you to take any lump from Egypt. It speaks of the influence of the world which we're called apart from.

And what is it saying? The kingdom is like leaven, there will be leavening. Listen, during the church age there will be an evil influence in the church. We will never be able to completely divorce ourselves from worldliness. The church will compromise with the world. Jesus said - That's the way it will be.

In verse 44, we find the next parable of the treasure hidden in a field and a man is working in the field and he stumbles across this treasure, and he buys the field because he's an honest man, he doesn't steal the treasure, he makes a deal and buys the whole field and then gets the treasure that's in it.

What is this saying? The treasure is salvation. The treasure is redemption. And when it is found, the man does all he can, sells everything he owns in order to get that. There will be people in this kingdom period who will give up everything to get the treasure. The interesting note about this parable is that the man wasn't looking for the treasure; it was in the routine of his work-a-day life that he was surprised by the reality of redemption. And there are many people who will come to know Jesus Christ in this period who will stumble, as it were, almost by accident, upon the grace of God.

The next parable in verse 45 is a parable of a man with the desire to find a pearl and he seeks and seeks and seeks fine pearls, finally finds the one that he wants, sells everything and buys it. Just like the last parable, this man is willing to pay the supreme price which is always the giving up of everything to purchase redemption. It's always that. And he takes this pearl. The difference is that this man has all the while been seeking for that pearl, and this tells that there will also be people in the kingdom who will spend a great amount of time seeking the truth and finally find it.

Some people will come without ever seeking. As C.S. Lewis put it, "Surprised by joy." Other people will spend a long time and effort endeavoring to find the truth.

Andthen the last parable in verse 47 is that of a net, and everything is pulled into the net and the good separated from the bad. And this pictures the end of the church age, the end of the mystery kingdom when Jesus pulls it all together and sorts out the true from the false.

Now that is a tremendously profound insight into our time. And we can verify every one of those, can't we? All of those we know to be true of this time. The mystery kingdom, the church age, is big. We have influenced the world. We have preached our message across the globe. We've seen that come to pass.

But we also see that the church is mixed with good and evil, isn't it? The true and the false, the wheat and the tares. And we know that as we proclaim, some reject and some accept for a little while and some are real and produce the fruit. We know that the enemy attacks us. We know we're influenced by the world and we neverseem to be able to purge the church. And we know there are people searching for God and sometimes going through religion after religion to find the answer. And there are others who seemingly right out of the blue are introduced to redemption. All of it in the end will be made clear by Christ. So, this is the character of our time. This is how it will be before the King returns.

Now, go back to the thought of parables in verse 3. So, the Lord teaches all of this in parables. Now listen very carefully. Admittingly, while parables explain things and parables help us understand things, and parables make things clear, listen, when they are explained to us ... an unexplained parable is nothing but an impossible riddle. An unexplained parable is an impossible riddle ... unable to be understood. And that is why He had to explain everything, even to His own disciples.

In Mark 4:10, indicating the same occasion, "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve, asked of Him the parable. And He said to them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but unto those that are outside, all these things are done in parables."

He said - It's only for you. Jesus only explained the parables to the twelve and those who believed. Not to the rest. All they got was unexplained parables. And those are nothing but riddles, unable to be understood.

Now, that takes us to verse 10 and the purpose for His plan. The disciples came and said to Him, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?" Why do You just give them these parables without explanation? Why do You do that? "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Now that tells us about the purpose of parables. They are to reveal and they are to ... what? ... conceal. To some they make truth clear, to others they make it even more unclear.

Now, Jesus says it's for you to know the mysteries. Now when He said that word, no doubt their cultural identification helped them to understand it better than we do. When we think of the word mystery, we think of Agatha Christi, or somebody. We think of some kind of whodunit? But that is not the way they did. In the Greek culture, in the Hellenistic world of that era, mysteries were sacred secrets known only to upper level religionists. They were truths only for the initiated.

Now, we have a parallel to that with the secret societies of today like the Masons and others who have these secret truths that nobody knows except the people who get to certain levels to know them. That's really a heritage borne out of Gnosticism, from the word gnosis, to know. We are the ones who are in the know, we know the secrets. And the mystery religions of ... of Greece which were borne out of Babylon, were religions in which there were these secrets that you attained as you moved up the ladder of that religion.

For example, one of the most famous mysteries was the mystery of Isis and Osiris. Osiris was a wise and good king, Seth his wicked brother hated him and with 72 conspirators persuaded him to come to a banquet**,** and when he came to the banquet, he put him in a coffin and threw him in the Nile River. But he was found by his wife and brought home and while he was at home, this gets complicated; Seth came again and cut his body into fourteen pieces, and shipped them to fourteen locations, throughout all Egypt...figuring that would be the end of Osiris. However, Osiris pulled himself together. Actually, his wife went everywhere and collected the pieces. And he rose from the dead... and became forever after the immortal king of the living... and the dead.

Now the initiated people were told what that story meant. Every one of those little things had a.... had a little secret. It talked about goodness being attacked by evil. The sorrowing search of love, the triumphal discovery that love finds its object,- raising to life, death conquered, reborn for eternity and the ultimate secret was that if you as a worshipper would say -To Osiris, I am thou and thou art I- you would then be placed in union with Osiris and live forever. That was the ultimate secret.

Now, without an explanation, you could only do your best to make sense out of that whole thing. But they had it down to a gnat's eyebrow.

Jesus says, - I'm going to show you mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The secrets never revealed to anybody. But they're given to you to know. But not to them because they don't accept the King. And so, the Lord then unfolds and hides at the same time.

Look at verse 12, "For whosoever hath," and here's the principle that He uses, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given and he shall have more abundance." Oh, what a great statement that is. You know what He's saying there? Whoever has ... whoever has what? Well, whoever has in the sense of having received from God that which comes to those who believe. Whoever is regenerate, whoever is part of the kingdom, whoever hasreceived the King and believes in the King and therefore identifies with the King, whoever has accepted God's truth will get more of God's truth... that is ascent, that is enlightenment, that is illumination, as the one who has gets more and more. Do you remember the parables of our Lord where you find the fa... the unfaithful servant and invariably the Lord will say - Take what he has and give it to those who already have more? And what he has he loses? To the one who accepts the simplicity of the King and His kingdom, God will begin to reveal an ascending

revelation of truth. That's what He says. To those who live up to the light of Christ, He will give more light and more light and more light. But then, look at the rest of the verse. "But whosoever hath not," that is whoever is not regenerate, whoever does not accept the King and His kingdom, whoever does not believe God, "from him shall be taken even what he has."

What does that mean? Well, there may have been a little bit of light dawning as he was being led to that point, certainly that was true of Israel. The King had come, He had taught, He had preached, He had done miracle after miracle. They had some understanding of who He was, some understanding of what He could do, some glimpses and foretastes of the kingdom. They had seen the signs of the Spirit of God. They had seen wonders. They had some of that, but when they said no to the King, even what they had they lost. None of it made anymore sense and they began to descent into more profound and deeper darkness all the time.

I think we see that today. Nobody in our society, no group of people in our society are as lost in terms of disorientation from their religion as Jewish people. They had the covenances, the promises, the ... the gifts of God, the fathers, the adoptions, all of that stuff in Romans 9. Paul said - You had everything. And as soon as they rejected the King and the light went out, they began to lose the meaning of everything they had. And I say now, that no one is as lost as they are because the religion they ascribe to makes no sense even to them. They can't put it together. Therefore Judaism has moved from orthodoxy to what is called Conservative Judaism, to reformed Judaism where they don't even believe the Bible is the Word of God. It's just been a descent ... into darkness, deeper and deeper and deeper darkness.

You see, if you live up to that light which Christ gives, then more light comes. If you refuse that light, then deeper darkness ensues. And the parables of the servants and the talents reiterate this again and again, take away what he has and give it to one whohas rightly responded to Me.

And so, He says even what they have they will lose. All men, then, now listen carefully; all men then are in progress, up or down. That's a fearful thing. No man stays static, the longer you know Jesus Christ, the more faithful He is to reveal His truth. The longer you refuse Jesus Christ, the deeper the pit of darkness becomes.

Verse 13, Jesus says, "Therefore I speak to them in parables. I speak to them in parables because this is an act of judgment.' They seeing see not; hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." Because they will not hear with understanding, they will not see, I will now speak to them so they cannot see. You see? See, what happens is willful rejection becomes judicial rejection. Man says no, so God says no as well. God confirms men in their own stubbornness; God binds them by their own chain. And for them the parables become interesting stories and they really don't know what the point is ... just riddles.

And then marvelous statement in verses 14 and 15. "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah," right on schedule. This was no surprise that they rejected the King. No surprise. They fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 6, verses 9 and 10, which saith, "By hearing you shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see and shall not perceive, for this people's heart has become fat, gross, their ears are dull of hearing, their eyes they've closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, should understandwith their heart and should be converted and I should heal them."

You know when Isaiah wrote that? Isaiah wrote that at a time of profound judgment on Israel. He had just pronounced a series of curses on them, He cursed them for all of their drunkenness, debauchery, their immorality, He cursed them for their bribery, He cursed them for their oppression of the poor. He cursed them for their hypocritical religion. And then, of course, at the height of all of that cursings, the King Uzziah died and the country plunged into the darkest days in a long time. They were on the edge of imminent conquering and the Babylonian captivity came as that judgment. And Isaiah says to them, "Now God's going to judge you, you wouldn't hear and you wouldn't see and now you can't hear and you can't see. You wouldn't be converted and you wouldn't be healed, and now you can'tbe healed or converted." And it wasn't long after that, Jeremiah echoed the message of Isaiah and the great hordes came and swept away the people into Babylonian captivity. That was the first fulfillment of Isaiah's words and Jesus says here's the second. So, parables, listen carefully, are a judgment on unbelief. The fact that the natural man understandeth not the things of God is not only a statement about his ignorance; it is a statement about God's judgment ... on that individual. And the fact that we who love Jesus Christ understand the Bible is not a statement about our intellect; it is a statement about God's gracious illumination ... of our hearts and minds.

This is judgment. Look at it this way. When Jesus first came, His words were very clear. He said He was the King. He proved He was the King. He preached the Kingdom message. He said - Here's how it is in My kingdom. He said -Repent, the kingdom is at hand. He gave them all they needed to know about the kingdom.

They didn't hear. They refused Him. So, when they wouldn't listen to the clear words that He spoke, and you remember back in Matthew 5 to 7, He would say the kingdom of heaven is like ... and then He would use that analogy, salt or light or birds or lilies of the field and He would always explain its meaning? Therefore He said - Seek ye first the kingdom and all these things will be added... it was always very clear what He meant. And then when they hardened their hearts and blasphemed Him and said He was from Satan, then He talked to them in riddles that He did not explain.

And you want to see what the third step was? Look at the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians. The fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians and verse 21, "In the law it is written," he says, quoting out of Isaiah 28, and here's another word of judgment pronounced by Isaiah on Israel, "with men of other

tongues, or languages, and other lips will I speak to this people, and yet for all that will they not hear Me, says the Lord. Wherefore languages, or tongues, are for a sign not to them that believe but to them that believe not."

Now Listen, people always ask me What are tongues for? It says right there, they are a sign. For whom? Not for those who believe, but for those who believe not. Where was tongues primarily used? On the day of Pentecost...in the face of the Israelites. Why? Listen; clearly they wouldn't listen when He spoke to them clearly in their own language, so He judged them by speaking in riddles. They wouldn't listen and seek the truth then so thirdly, He spoke to them in a language they didn't even know. You see the progression of judgment? Tongues are a sign of judgment ... upon Israel. God is now talking so you can't even understand the language.

Now, go back to Matthew 13 with that in mind. So that He says the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled. And by the way, that prophecy is quoted no less than five times in the New Testament and every time it's quoted it is in relation to Israel's rejection of the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, the plan was to speak in parables. And the purpose of the parables was to reveal and to conceal.

Now, we've seen the conceal, let's look at the reveal in verse 16. "But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear." Isn't that great? I mean, that's the other side. We understand the parables. You say -How so? Because Jesus explained them and we have the New Testament text and also because the Spirit of God is our teacher. That's the illumination.

Mark 4:34 of this same incident says, "He expounded all things to them." And over in verse 52, do you see it there of Matthew 13? Fifty-one, rather..."Jesus said to them, Have you understood all these things? And they said unto Him ... what?...yes, Lord." They weren't smarter; they just possessed the illuminating presence of Jesus Christ. This was part of His ministry. At the end of Luke's gospel, and verse 45, after the road to Emmaus, it says, "Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." And you want to know something?

Listen to me, even though you're regenerate, you would still not understand the Scripture were it not for the illuminating work of the Spirit of God. That is His marvelous illuminating work and that is why the Psalmist in Psalm 119:18 cries out, "Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of Thy law." That's...that's the heart of Isaiah in 64:1 when he says, "0 God, rend the heavens and come down." I've got to have an explanation is what he's saying.

But verse 17 says, "I say unto you, many prophets and righteous men desire to see those things which ye see, have seen them not, and to hear the things you hear, and have heard them not." Isaiah said, "Rend the heavens and come down." And he wasn't alive when the heavens were rent, and He did come down. They were not perfected, Hebrews 11 says, without us. Peter says, they were looking

into their own prophecies and searching what person and what time these things would come to pass.

They didn't get to see what we see. They didn't see what the disciples saw in the heavens being rent and God coming down in human flesh ... to reveal His truth. Oh how wonderful it is that we now have the resident Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. That one of whom it says in I Corinthians that He searches the deep things of God... and reveals them to us. And we only know them because of the Spirit revealing them to us. Even for the saved there has to be divine illumination. That doesn't mean we don't have to study, we have to study to keep from being ashamed. There's the discipline of study and in the process the illumination of the Spirit of God.

So, parables conceal as an act of judgment against Israel. At the same time they reveal because Jesus gave the parables and gave the explanation. Today we have the Word. You say--Jesus isn't here to explain. No, but He said when I go away I'll send another explainer ... the Holy Spirit. And He'll lead you into all truth.

Do you realize what a privilege we have? Do you realize that we not only have this book, but we have its author living in us? To explain it to us? To interpret it to us? To apply it to us? How they of old hungered for that. And so, the plan and so the purpose.

One other thought came to my mind, that is the promise...the promise. As a person who tries to think logically and as I try to anticipate the question, the inevitable question and it came from several sources is - Well, if the King offered the kingdom and they rejected it, did this foul up the plan? Is God up in heaven making alterations? Is He adjusting saying - I sent the King, if they accept the King they get the kingdom if they don't accept the King they don't get the kingdom so I've got to have plan A and plan B? Does this alter what's going on? The fact that He had to judge these people for their unbelief and the kingdom had to be postponed and the mystery age had to be dropped in, was that sort of an additional thing tacked on when things didn't work out the way they were supposed to?

Let's look at the promise in verse 35. Verse 34 says, 'He spoke only in parables," and verse 35 says, "In order that, for the purpose that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, I will open My mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." Marvelous...you know who said that? Asaph in I Chronicles 29 verse 30, it says Asaph was a prophet and a seer and that is what he said in Psalm 78 verse 2, that's a Psalm by Asaph. And Asaph predicted that the Messiah would have to speak in parables, that He would have to speak in parables as an act of judgment. And that to His own people He would reveal a secret kept from the foundation of the world. Listen, God didn't adjust, before the foundation of the world He knew they would reject and He knew He'd have to put that secret mystery period in there.

What does that say? That says everything's on schedule. God is not making alterations as He goes. He's sovereign, everything is on schedule.

Well, I hope that wets your appetite a little bit for the message of Matthew 13. That's just the beginning. Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say. There are some great profound lessons that we've seen just this morning. Let me sum up the key ones.

First, truth is only available to people who believe and are taught by God. The other side of that is this second truth, rejection of Jesus Christ means the decreasing darkness of unbelief. You don't stay in the same spot. It gets deeper and deeper and deeper.

And the third point that I want you to see is that God's plan is on schedule. It's big enough to encompass the unbelief of Israel and the mystery of this age. Let's bow in prayer.

While you're meditating for a moment before I lead you in prayer, if you're looking into your own heart and you know you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, you have not received Him as Lord and Savior, you're not staying in the same spot. You're slowly and exorably moving into deeper darkness and the inevitability of the judgment of God. But it need not be so, for God calls you to Christ even this hour while you canstill hear, and promises that if you receive the light of the Lord Jesus Christ there shall be an ever increasing light, an ever increasing illumination of spiritual truth until finally someday you shall know as you are known in the eternal presence of the living Lord. You can make the commitment to Jesus Christ right where you are this morning. Some of us Christians have in our hands this incredible gift and dwelling within our souls the teacher and give little opportunity to either to work in us. May we be faithful to refresh that commitment to the Word and the Spirit through the Word.

Do Your work, Lord, in the hearts of all who are here. Thank You for letting us be alive now when we have the book and the Spirit. Thank You for even letting the unbelievers here be alive now when they can hear from the Book, they can witness the power of the Spirit as He transforms lives and moves through His church, convicts. We pray that no one will go from this place who has not embraced Jesus Christ or has not refreshed a vow to commitment to Him. We pray in His name. Amen.

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