

Matthew 12:46 – 13:58

^{12:46} While he was still speaking to the crowds, behold, his mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone said to him, 'Behold, your mother and your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you.' ⁴⁸ But Jesus answered the one who was telling him and said, 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?' ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Behold my mother and my brothers!' ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.'

Parable 1 ^{13:1} That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. ² And large crowds gathered to him, so he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. ³ And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying, 'Behold, the sower went out to sow; ⁴ and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. ⁸ And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.' ¹⁰ And the disciples came and said to him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' ¹¹ Jesus answered them, 'To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. ¹² For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; ¹⁵ for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.' ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. ¹⁸ Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. ²⁰ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²³ And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.'

Parable 2 ²⁴ Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷ The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'''

Parable 3 ³¹ He presented another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; ³² and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that 'the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.'

Parable 4 ³³ He spoke another parable to them, 'The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.'

³⁴ All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and he did not speak to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.' ³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.' ³⁷ And he said, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, ³⁸ and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send forth his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, ⁴² and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then 'the righteous will shine forth as the sun' in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Parable 5 ⁴⁴ The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Parable 6 ⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, ⁴⁶ and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Parable 7 ⁴⁷ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, ⁵⁰ and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ Have you understood all these things?' They said to him, 'Yes.' ⁵² And Jesus said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.' ⁵³ When Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there. ⁵⁴ He came to his hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And his sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.' ⁵⁸ And he did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

Questions

1. There is a shift in location between Jesus outside of the house (13:1 extending all the way to 13:35) and Jesus inside the house (13:36 – 53). What's the difference between what he says outside and inside the house?
 - a. Outside:
 - i. Parable 1 and 2 make people ask more questions, get closer. The disciples do. They get the explanations of the parables.
 - ii. Parables 3 and 4 are designed to jar a Jewish audience and kind of shock them into asking more questions. The kingdom of heaven is like hospitality that you don't want to give (inviting birds into your own garden) or hospitality you don't want to receive (leavened bread). Most Jews did not think the kingdom of heaven would be like that. Jesus is saying it's costly.
 - b. Inside:
 - i. The disciples get an explanation of parable 1.
 - ii. They get an explanation of the parable 2.
 - iii. They also get parables 5 and 6, which involve a heavy cost (like in parables 3 and 4) but show great joy at paying the cost. This is the 'inside story' of parables 3 and 4, which only feature the cost.
 - iv. They seem to get parable 7 too.
2. How is Jesus using the physical marker of being outside or inside 'the house' to talk about being outside or inside 'the kingdom'?
 - a. Contrast: The main comparison is between parables 3 and 4, with parables 5 and 6. This seems to be the central point in the seven kingdom parables, and in Matthew's Gospel as a whole. To the outsider, the Christian giving up his or her life for Jesus' kingdom looks stupid. But to that person, the insider, it's a great bargain.
 - b. From this point on, Jesus' ministry continues to divide all Israel, and all people everywhere, and we are now given an interpretive lens on how to read that. Jesus' intention is to form a household of faith that is doing the will of his Father (12:46 – 50). The result is that human beings are divided (13:51 – 58). Those who commit to Jesus are doing 'the will of [the] Father' by receiving Jesus' word. The word of Jesus is the word of the Father, and it calls and fashions a new family, a new household.
 - c. (if people ask) Were these 'cousins' of Jesus in 13:55? Did Mary have other biological children? Was she a virgin for her whole life?
 - i. The theory that the brethren of Jesus were his cousins originated with Jerome, who had a highly exalted view of virginity, and apparently wanted to establish the perpetual virginity of Joseph, as well as preserve the virginity of Mary. His argument was linguistic; Aramaic lacked a distinct word for non-sibling blood relatives of the same generation, hence called all of them brothers or sisters. But Jerome conveniently ignores that GREEK, the language in which the Gospels and Epistles were written, has a perfectly good word for "cousin", which is "anepsios", a word which is even found in the New Testament at Col 4:10, where Paul calls Mark the cousin (anepsios) of Barnabas. As Paul ALSO refers to James as 'the brother of the Lord' (Gal.1:19), one would have to assume that when Paul chose the word "brother" for James, but "cousin" for Mark, he knew what he was talking about. All of which makes Jerome's theory rather lame.
 - ii. The theory that Joseph was a widower with children by his first wife originates with the fourth century Church historian Epiphanius, who cites the first century historian Papias as his source. Papius, whose work is lost to us, except as quoted in the work of others, claimed to have spoken with those who had known Jesus and the Twelve, writing down as much of their memories as they would share with him.
 - iii. Here is an old Joseph with children in that work, the Protoevangelium of James: "9. And Joseph, throwing away his axe, went out to meet them; and when they had assembled, they went away to the high priest, taking with them their rods. And he, taking the rods of all of them, entered into the temple, and prayed; and having ended his prayer, he took the rods and came out, and gave them to them: but there was no sign in them, and Joseph took his rod last; and, behold, a dove came out of the rod, and flew upon Joseph's head. And the priest said to Joseph, Thou hast been chosen by lot to take into thy keeping the virgin of the Lord. But Joseph refused, saying: I have children, and I am an old man, and she is a young girl. I am afraid lest I become a laughing-stock to the sons of Israel. And the priest said to Joseph: Fear the Lord thy God, and remember what the Lord did to Dathan, and Abiram, and Korah; how the earth opened, and they were swallowed up on account of their contradiction. And now fear, O Joseph, lest the same things happen in thy house. And Joseph was afraid, and took her into his keeping. And Joseph said to Mary: Behold, I have received thee from the temple of the Lord; and now I leave thee in my house, and go away to build my buildings, and I shall come to thee. The Lord will protect thee."
3. What do parables 5 and 6 mean? Note the parallels
 - a. Parable 5: Why does the man buy the whole field? To have legitimate rights to the treasure. It seems like the treasure was too big to dig out all at once, or too heavy to carry away, or something. So he has to buy the whole field.
 - b. Parable 6: Why does the merchant buy the great pearl? It defies explanation. He doesn't want to sell it and make lots of money. He just wants to have it. It's kind of like Gollum, raving about 'my precious.' But all of his skills, which he's refined with lesser pearls, recognize that this pearl is intrinsically valuable and beautiful. He doesn't want it for the money. He just wants it. His heart is won over.

4. How is Jesus explicitly or implicitly talking about the human heart?
 - a. Our hearts must be soft to receive Jesus' word (parable 1), because his word changes our hearts
 - b. Our hearts must be prepared to receive and include others in God's family (parables 2 – 4; the outer brackets of Jesus redefining family as 'the family of God')
 - i. The Old Testament used soil quality to describe heart quality: 'Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord your God, and take away the foreskins of your heart, lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it.' (Jeremiah 4:4)
 - c. Our hearts must perceive the kingdom (reign) of God in our lives as ultimately valuable, for its own sake (parables 5 – 6). Jesus gave everything for it. He calls us to give everything as well.
 - d. So we are not neutral observers. Because Jesus calls for us to change, we cannot just consider this neutrally! Our self-affirmation instinct is really strong and must be put to death.
5. The Old Testament quotations. What Old Testament quotations give you a sense that the Messiah would cause a separation in Israel?
 - a. Isaiah 6 (quoted in 13:14 – 15) speaks of God dividing Israel at the time of Messiah
 - b. Psalm 78 (quoted in 13:35) speaks of God blessing Israel but Israel rebelling
 - c. Isaiah 55 and onward speaks of a division in Israel because of the Messiah (Isa.53)
6. Application: How can we manifest to people the reality that the cost is worth it?
 - a. Know: understand how much Jesus paid personally to bring about the kingdom of God in human flesh. It cost him everything!
 - b. Joy: not manufactured, but authentic joy rooted in our personal knowledge of Jesus. It is primarily his own personal joy that the disciples saw. They even said, 'for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame,' (Hebrews 12:2). The joy is secondarily ours as we understand him more and more.
 - c. Love: Jesus' love is made known in his new humanity for all humanity
7. Application: But isn't this dependent on people first stepping over the line to be 'insiders', to become Christians? Is it all circular? NO.
 - a. Jesus actually taught out of the Book of Isaiah most often. Isaiah, and in fact the entire Old Testament, serves as the objective reference point. For more information, see my notes on how Isaiah appears in the Gospel of Matthew.
 - b. Jesus' resurrection needs to be included as part of the proof of Christian faith. You can investigate it as you would any other historical event. Note that Dr. Simon Greenleaf, one of the founders of Harvard Law School, and a preeminent lawyer and professor of law, sought out to disprove the New Testament's historical reliability. He wound up becoming a Christian instead, writing a book called *The Testimony of the Evangelists*.