

## **PARABLES OF JESUS PART 3**

What is the Kingdom of Heaven? – The Soils (The Sower)

Over the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at eight of Jesus's parables that are in Matthew Chapter 13. That chapter is often referred to as "The Kingdom of Heaven Chapter" because all the parables contained in it deal with something that Jesus calls, "the kingdom of heaven."

### **Defining The Kingdom of Heaven**

Now, I am going to begin by clarifying any confusion. You have the six statements that are in Q1 and they are alleged to be true. However, ONE of them is NOT true. The others are. We are going to go through each of these one by one.

*[These six statements served as a guideline in explaining the concept of the kingdom of heaven:*

*The terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" mean the same thing.*

*Matthew is the only New Testament writer using the term "kingdom of heaven."*

*The kingdom of heaven is ruled by THE KING, God Himself.*

*The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom that has been established only in heaven.*

*Jesus the Messiah King returned to heaven rather than rule and reign on earth.*

*When Jesus returns again, He will rule and reign on earth for 1000 years.]*

### **Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom God, Same Thing**

We are going to begin with the first statement which says, the terms "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" mean the same thing. So, let me show you that this is true from Matthew Chapter 19...

And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:23).

And then in the very next verse Jesus is reiterating what He just said and He says...

"Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24).

So, you see that He is saying the same thing. In one verse He says "kingdom of heaven" and in the next verse He says "kingdom of God." What I want you to see is "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God," same thing.

### **Matthew's Unique Use of "Kingdom of Heaven"**

The next statement in Q1 says that Matthew is the only New Testament writer that uses the term "kingdom of heaven." That also is true. Thirty-two times He uses that term in his gospel. The other New Testament writers will say either "kingdom of God" or "His kingdom" or just plain "kingdom."

I will show you an example of that. In Matthew 4:17 Jesus is preaching near the Sea of Galilee at the beginning of His ministry. And this is His message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Now, if you go to Mark's gospel, the very same event is recorded in Mark 1:15. And he says that Jesus is preaching, "The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe..." So, the very same event Matthew says, "kingdom of heaven" and Mark says, "kingdom of God." So, that is what I want you to see. They are the same thing.

### **God is THE KING**

What is the kingdom of heaven? A kingdom, by definition, is "a country, state, or territory ruled by a king." The kingdom of heaven is no different. The third statement says, the kingdom of heaven is ruled by THE

KING, God Himself. This is true. So, the first three statements you have seen so far are true.

There are two biblical viewpoints of the kingdom of heaven. The first one views the kingdom of heaven as a universal kingdom. God, as Creator of the universe, is the sovereign Ruler of everyone and everything for all eternity. The psalmist has this view in mind in Psalm 29:10 where he says, "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as King forever." Psalm 103:19 says, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all." So then, when you and I were born, we became part of this universal kingdom of heaven as members of the human race.

Now, with all that being said, this is NOT the viewpoint of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus has in mind in Matthew Chapter 13. The fourth statement says the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom that has been established only in heaven. NO. So, that is the statement that is NOT true. Jesus sees the kingdom of heaven as a heavenly kingdom, yes, that is established... are you ready for this? A kingdom here on the earth.

So, there are two big differences in kingdom of heaven. One is a universal kingdom that Psalms talks about, God as ruler of everything. But then there is this kingdom of heaven that Jesus is talking about on earth.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prays, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10 KJV). So, that is the view Jesus is talking about. The concept that the kingdom of heaven is coming to earth. God's rule right here on earth. So, what do we know about THIS view of the kingdom of heaven?

### **God's Rule on the Earth – Genesis thru Revelation**

*[I felt that the following explanation was necessary to lay the groundwork for the kingdom of heaven parables in Matthew 13.]*

When God created the world, His perfect design was to rule the earth through mankind. God told Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). They were to mediate God's rule on earth. Then came the Fall in Genesis 3. Man rebelled against God and sin entered the picture. At that point man abdicated his responsibility to rule the earth and Satan became the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4), the "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). But God did NOT leave Satan in charge.

Despite the mess that man had made of things, God mediated His rule on earth now through special people that He raised up – men like Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. You have heard of all those guys. Then God called out a nation of people, the nation of Israel, to mediate His rule on earth. Israel was to pass along to the world the word of God – His statutes and principles given in the Law at Mount Sinai; the mind and heart of God. They were to show the world GOD; the knowledge of the one true God mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:4.

In time God raised up Israel's prophets and priests and kings to mediate His rule; prophets like Elijah, Isaiah and Daniel; priests like Samuel and Ezra; and kings like David and Solomon. Eventually God intervened personally. He sent His Son Jesus to earth. Jesus arrived in human form. His birth is the Christmas narrative. Jesus grew up and taught us and showed us what God is like. Jesus the Messiah King that the Old Testament prophets spoke about all those years – He finally arrived on the scene. And when He did, He spent 3-plus years preaching the kingdom of heaven. He did all the things that the Messiah was prophesied would do. He gave sight to the blind. He made the lame to walk. He made the deaf to hear. He cleansed lepers. He raised the dead back to life. Jesus performed signs and wonders. And He also preached the Gospel. He called on people to repent and to be subject to the kingdom. BUT the Messiah King ended up being rejected by His own.

So, after His mission of redemption was complete with His death on the cross, His burial and resurrection, Jesus spent several weeks with His disciples. And then – and now we get to the fifth statement – Jesus the Messiah King returned to heaven rather than rule and reign on the earth. He did not set up His kingdom on the earth, not at THAT time.

But the message of the kingdom of heaven continued. It was carried by the apostles and evangelists and preachers throughout the centuries in what we call the Church Age. The church (comprised of believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit) became God's instruments through whom He mediated His rule on the earth. We the church preached the Gospel. We spoke the word of God. We continue to speak the word of God. We uphold God's standards (or we should). We show the world God's will and His moral values. We are to call people everywhere to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The requirement for admission into the kingdom of heaven, this particular definition of it [the kingdom of heaven on earth], is faith in Jesus and submission to His rule in your life.

The Gospel message is preached today primarily through the Gentiles. Now, about 5 percent of Jews in the world believe in Jesus. During the Tribulation period (seven years) there is going to be a revival among the Jews. [They will come to Christ in large numbers and] they will lead a worldwide revival. That happens in Revelation 7 and not long after that Jesus returns to earth. And that brings us to the last statement in Q1, which is, when Jesus returns again, He WILL rule and reign on the earth for 1000 years. That is when He will set up His kingdom.

That is followed by the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20). [Finally, it all ends with an] eternal kingdom comprised of a new heaven and new earth that you can read about in Revelation 21 and 22. So, there you have the big picture overview. So, what does this have to do with the kingdom of heaven in Matthew Chapter 13? Here we go.

## **The Great Mystery Revealed in Parables**

We are now going to unpack the great mystery that gets revealed in the kingdom of heaven parables that we are going to be looking at in Matthew 13. Look at your timeline again. *[Note: this "timeline" is an in-class handout, a one-page biblical timeline that summarizes the events from Genesis to Revelation].* I want to show you something. Do you see the Church Age? Q2 asks, the period of time we are living in now, the "Church Age," is not alluded to in the WHAT? The Old Testament. It was not talked about. It was not foreseen in the Old Testament. Yes, the Old Testament prophets did foresee the first coming of the Messiah, who we know now to be Jesus. His birth in Bethlehem and by a virgin was all foretold by the prophets. They foresaw certain things about their Messiah, about Jesus, such as His preaching and His miracles and all the signs and wonders. Isaiah even talked about His rejection and suffering. All the prophets foresaw His second coming, His rule and reign on the earth and the final judgment.

*[I reference a PowerPoint slide I showed previously that depicts visually the concept of "near" and "far" prophecies and it is described as follows...]*

It is like you are standing out in eastern Colorado and you are looking at the mountain range. All the mountains appear to be in the same place, about the same distance away. In reality some of the mountains you see are a lot farther away than others. Some are in the forefront (on the front range) and some are much farther away. The diagram I like to show depicts a prophet looking into the future and he sees this mountain [which represents a "near" event]; and behind it is another mountain [which represents a "far" event]. In between these two mountains is a gap of time. That gap of time, which I want you to see, is the Church Age. That is the gap of time that the Old Testament prophets did not see. They saw the first and second coming [of the Messiah] as one event [in time]. But we know that they are two different events separated by some gap of time. They did not see it that way. They just saw the events.

So, Q3, True or false? The eight Matthew Chapter 13 parables unlock mysteries about the kingdom of heaven that people in Jesus's day would not have been aware of. True. That is the mystery Jesus is going to unlock. In the Bible, in the New Testament, when Paul and others talk about a "mystery," what that means is something that is revealed now that was not revealed in the Old Testament. The Church Age is one of those mysteries that they did not see in the Old Testament. And Jesus is revealing that to His audience. So, this "in between" period is the mystery that gets revealed in the kingdom of heaven parables. [This would have been] a brand-new concept to the audiences in Jesus's day, including His disciples. Remember, His disciples even thought that Jesus was going to set up His kingdom now. They were going to rule with Jesus, right? They did not understand it was going to come later on after a period of 2000 years plus.

So then, what I want you to see before we get into our first parable is that the kingdom of heaven is not just in heaven. It is not some "pie in the sky by and by" concept. It is not a mythical kingdom like Narnia. And it is not just something that is way off in the distant future somewhere. What Jesus is trying to get His audience to understand -- the kingdom of heaven is here and now on the earth. That is what you need to understand for these eight "kingdom of heaven" parables to make sense.

*[Brief comment emphasizing the concept of the kingdom of heaven being here on the earth.]*

### **The Soils (the Sower)**

Most people know this as the Parable of the Sower, but a better title is the Parable of the Soils. The emphasis here is more on the different kinds of soil that receive the seed than on the sower (the one who plants the seed). In all the cases you have the same seed and the same sower. But you have different soils.

Here is your first kingdom of heaven parable. Like I said, in this chapter there are eight of these. This parable is rather lengthy. We are going to look at the first 9 verses [of Matthew 13] which is the parable

itself as Jesus tells it. No explanation yet. That comes later. This is just Jesus telling the parable. It is interesting – He is telling it standing in a boat off shore. So, Jesus is projecting out to this crowd [on the shore] from a boat...

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about Him, [that is nothing unusual -- wherever Jesus goes He draws great crowds] so that He got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And He told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them" [they devoured them because the seeds could not penetrate, the ground was too hard]. Other seeds fell on rocky [stoney] ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose, they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:1-9).

In other words, [this is] Jesus's way of saying, "Pay attention. You need to listen to this."

In Q4, the sower in this parable represents who? It is any person that shares the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, the word of God. Jesus states, "A sower went out to sow." What does the sower sow? He or she sows seeds. Q5 asks, True or false? The seed in this parable is truth from God's word. True. The seed represents the Gospel message taught by Jesus, His disciples – and us (hopefully). We are also sharing the word, right? So, that is what the seed represents.

Q6 asks, in this parable, who do the various types of soils represent? Hearts and minds. They are representative of the hearts and minds of people; the various, if you will, "environments" that the Gospel message is

received. Now, it is clear from this parable that some people are more receptive to the Gospel message than others. That is obvious, right? Since we are all agents of free will (and we are, we are not robots), each person determines for themselves what type of soil they will be.

Whether into good soil or bad soil, the seed is sown faithfully, indiscriminately and in good measure. But based on what Jesus says there is a great variation in the yield. Q7 asks, in this parable the sower sows the seed and yet no crop is produced. Whose fault is it? It is the soil's fault. By the way, we are going to see this later when we get to Jesus's explanation of the parable. You might say, "How can that be?" Well, it could be for a lack of interest. It could be for misplaced priorities. It could be lack of commitment, lack of faith, whatever. There are a lot of different reasons why, but it is the soil's fault.

### **A Personal Testimony About Soils**

Now, I want to tell you a little story. I lived in a house many years ago and, try as I might, I could not get grass to grow in a certain spot in my front yard. I planted, I watered, I fertilized and I prayed. Still nothing. Grass was growing just fine everywhere else in my front yard except for this one spot. And it was not in the shade. That was not the issue. It was out in the open sunlight. So, I lived in this rural community out in West Texas. I talked to some agriculture experts in the area that I was friends with. They concluded my problem was bad soil. Something in the soil (who knows what it was) was preventing my grass seed from germinating, from being able to grow. So, what I did was I spent some time with shovel and wheelbarrow swapping the bad soil in my front yard for better soil that came from my alley. The grasses and the weeds were just flourishing back there! After my labor-intensive transfer of soils was complete, I planted grass seed in the new so-called "good" soil in my front yard. And what do you suppose happened? Within only a few weeks after watering, fertilizing and praying (the exact same thing I did before), I began to see positive results. I got some grass! I was able to grow grass in the very same place where it had not grown before. The difference was not me. The difference

as not the grass seed. I used the same grass seed. The difference was the soil. So, that is my little illustration. All I needed was just different soil, better soil.

Notice that in this parable there are four different soils mentioned. You have the path. That is ground that has been exposed and compacted because people walk on it. It is hard. You have the rocky or the stoney ground. You have thorny ground. And you have good or fertile soil. Later that day Jesus is talking privately with His disciples. He explains (at their request) what each of these types of soil represent. And that takes us to Q8, which is matching. We are going to go one by one here.

### **Seed on the Path**

“Hear then the parable of the sower: 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 what was sown along the path” (Matthew 13:18-19).

So, Jesus is explaining what that first kind of soil represents, “the path,” well-compacted hard soil, as I mentioned. The seed cannot penetrate the ground because it has been walked on. The surface is too hard and so the birds come along and eat it. This type of soil represents hardened hearts, soil that is trampled on by those in the world. This type of soil is representative of people who expose themselves day after day to the ways of the world. The answer then is B. They have neither the time nor the interest in the seeds of truth that fall their way. They adopt worldly attitudes and worldly priorities. From the very beginning the seed that falls on them stands little chance of taking root. These people hear the Gospel message but they do not receive it. Jesus says, “The evil one [Satan] snatches away what has been sown in a person’s heart.”

### **Seed on Rocky Ground**

Now, there is another kind of soil that is found in v 20-21...

“As for what was sown on rocky [stoney] ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matthew 13:20-21).

The seed germinates in the crevices. [In this rocky ground] there are little crevices where it can get down, but the roots are shallow and unable to penetrate very deep. And it soon withers in the hot sun. This type of soil represents those who hear the Gospel (again they are hearing the truth, hearing the word) and react emotionally to it. They initially receive it with much joy but there is no root. So, the answer here is C. They have a very superficial, non-genuine faith. It is not rooted, not deeply. This [type of] person is not rooted very deeply in Christ. Therefore, when troubles and the pressures of life come, they immediately fall away. To the casual observer it would appear as though their conversion to Christ was real. I am not saying it was or it was not, but it appears that it is real. But when problems arise, their true colors are revealed. Be careful about emotional responses to things!

### **Seed on Thorny Ground**

“As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

So, the seed that falls among the thorns, it takes root but can only grow so much before being choked out. It fails to produce a crop. Now, I believe that this type of soil represents those who do, in fact, receive Christ as Savior (maybe or maybe not, that is just my opinion), but over time are choked out by the things of the world. It appears that they are true converts, but there is just no fruit in their life. They get busy with things of the world. The answer is A. They allow the cares of this world, the hustle and bustle of our modern society to consume their time and energies. It is easy to do, isn't it? As a result, they become fruitless Christians. The

material things of this world become more important to them than their walk with the Lord. They are, as it were, “choked out” spiritually. Jesus mentions two primary distractions to one’s [spiritual] growth: the worries [or cares] of the world and the deceitfulness of riches [or wealth]. These two things distract them.

### **Seed on Good Soil**

“As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (Matthew 13:23).

This is the good soil. The seed that falls on it takes root and grows to full maturity, eventually producing a crop. The answer is D. This type of soil represents those who follow Christ and then continue to grow and mature in Him. Most importantly, they themselves bear fruit. Now, what does that mean? Well, there are all kinds of interpretations of what it means to “bear fruit.” It could be the fruit of the Spirit. That is certainly a possibility. Their life exhibits godliness. It could be that they have an impact on others for the kingdom. They are producing converts. After all, what does fruit produce? It produces more seeds! So, any one of those interpretations is fine, but it [is a life that] is fruitful (productive).

Q9 asks, True or false? In those who are fully receptive to the Gospel message, who seek God’s face and are committed to Him, you will find varying degrees of fruitfulness. True. That is what Jesus is saying here. “He [or she] bears fruit and yields... a hundredfold, or sixty or thirty.” So, even in good hearts, in those who are fully receptive to the Gospel message, who seek God’s face (His will) and are committed to Him, there are varying degrees of fruitfulness. It is not to be concluded from this parable that one bearing more fruit is necessarily more spiritual. Nowhere here does Jesus praise one over the other. He just states a fact – some are just more fruitful than others. What Jesus wants us to be is fruitful. [The Christian life] is not a competition. What is important to understand is that one’s life

be productive for the kingdom (talking about the kingdom of heaven here on earth). Be productive!

### **What Type of Soil Am I?**

Notice that each of these four types of soils represents different responses to the same truth, the same Gospel message. Some will hear only. Others will hear and understand, but nothing more. Others will hear, understand and actually respond positively to it. But the good soils represent those who hear, understand, respond and produce fruit.

So, the question comes as you apply this parable to your own life, "What type of soil am I?" The evidence of good soil is in what it ultimately produces.

The last question, Q10 really makes you think [about what Jesus is saying about the kingdom of heaven on the earth]. We see from this parable various types of people represented in the "kingdom of heaven." Does this mean that all of them are true believers in Jesus Christ?

The answer to this question is NO and I will explain why.

*[I brought up in class an illustration I have used before that fit with this lesson. I call it my "Christian Box." It is a box of 64 Crayola crayons. Each crayon inside is labeled with a different group or individual that claims to be "Christian." Therefore, they are all claiming to be part of the kingdom of heaven. However, based on what we know about them, many are not Christians, despite their claim to be so.]*

### **The Scariest Passage in the Bible**

Many people will say, "I love Jesus." But clearly, they are not all saved.

There is a passage of scripture which I think is very scary. It is found in Matthew Chapter 7 and v 21. It drives home the point I am trying to make here. Jesus says this:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, [Wow! What a statement!] but the one who does the will of

My Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?' And then will I declare to them, [this is Jesus speaking -- scary words] 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

There will be a later parable about the wheat and the tares. In that parable you will have Christians and non-Christians growing up side-by-side and you cannot tell the difference. But there is coming a judgment day when they will get sorted out. So, we are going to get to that parable later. These kingdom of heaven parables make more sense when you apply them to the Church Age (the age we are living in), especially with all these people around us who claim to be part of the kingdom of heaven.

### **Application**

The Soils: In the kingdom of heaven, we (who claim to be God's people) plant the seed of the Gospel. We tell others about Jesus. And though our message is the same to anyone who will listen to us, the results will vary depending on people's hearts and their willingness to receive the Good News that Jesus offers. Some are receptive and some are not.

In the kingdom of heaven there are many people whose hearts appear to be "good soil." They receive Christ eagerly but then they never grow or they grow very gradually. Others appear to flourish, but fail to produce any fruit.

God gives us all things, all blessings, not only for our enjoyment (that is true, He does give us blessings for us to enjoy), but we are to take those blessings and then honor and glorify Him with them. We are to invest them in the kingdom.

My prayer for all of us in this class is that we will be good soil and ultimately produce good fruit; as we come in contact with people, that they will see the evidence of Jesus Christ living in us and the fruit of the Spirit lived out in our lives.