

# “QUERY The Kingdom Of God”

Matthew 13:10-51

December 4, 2022

**INTRO:** *If you could ask Jesus anything, what would it be?*<sup>(20)</sup>

If Jesus were to ask you a Q... what do you think it would be?

Today we’re going to press into those 2 questions biblically...

## PRAYER

### CONTEXT:

~ Series: **SEE The Kingdom Of God**

~ Scripture: Matthew ch. 13 (2 arches today)

~ So far: SEE... BE... and today: **Brilliant Q&A**

### “QUERY The Kingdom Of God”

(3 Q&A sessions between the beginning/end of 8 parables)

> Q&A Disciples <--> Jesus

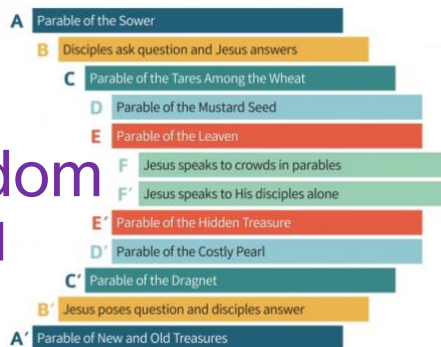
> Q&A Jesus <--> Disciples

> Q&A Each of Us <--> Jesus

Matthew  
Ch. 13

The  
Kingdom  
of God

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Therefore, *I speak to them in parables*, **BECAUSE**

- 1 seeing *they see not* and hearing *they hear not*, nor understand.
- 2 And *it is fulfilled to them* the prophecy of Isaiah which says,
- 3 "Hearing you *shall hear* and shall *not understand*,
- 4 and seeing you *shall see* and shall *not perceive*.
- 5 For this peoples *heart is become dull*
- 6 and the *ears are dull of hearing*
- 7 and their eyes they have closed,
- 7' lest they should perceive with the eyes
- 6' and hear with the *ear*
- 5' and understand with the *heart*, and should turn again and I should heal them."
- 4' But blessed, are *your eyes*, for they see,
- 3' and *your ears*, for they hear.
- 2' For truly I say *unto you* that many *prophets* and righteous men
- 1' desired to see what you *see*, & *did not see*, & to hear what you *hear*, & *did not hear*.

(Biblically contextualizing arches builds clarity & confidence in our interpretation.)

**BIG IDEA:** *The Word of God speaks sharply to and about dull hearts*

Hebrews 4:12

For **the word of God** is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

**TEXT:** Matthew 13:10 & 13:51

## I. Q&A Disciples <--> Jesus

Matthew 13:10-11

Then the disciples came and said to him, **“Why do you speak to them in parables?”** <sup>11</sup> **And he answered them,** *“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.*

**NOTE:** see the concern in the question.... Don't miss this

*The good soil produces God's sowers... and God's sowers see souls in the soil!*

## VIDEO: *Parable of the Soils #5*

Let's unpack Jesus unpacking Isaiah... in vv.14-15

**14** *Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive."* **15** **For this people's heart has grown dull,** and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them...

### Note:

- ~ *"people"* = singular, defining group (*Who are your people?*)
- ~ *"heart"* = singular, category of people/**SOIL**/fruit & faith
- ~ *"grown"* = progressive, active verb/movement **change**

***Those who reject & push away God  
will be rejected and pushed away by God.***

-JDP

### Don't miss this...

There is a biblical & eternal difference between someone having no chance to want or worship Christ (cf. John 3:16) and/or people choosing to reject Christ and then being given over to their wicked wants and ways.

\* This specific “*truth in love*” has led to much confusion & corruption in the cultural church. - JDP

### 2 Thessalonians 2:10b-12

There are: “those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore, God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

**VIDEO:** *Parable of the Soils #6*

*Cultural church is filled with dull, lukewarm hearts – bad soil, faithless-ness & plastic fruit! - JDP*

Take it directly from Jesus & God’s Word:

*Bad soil is **BAD** soil... & good soil is **God’s** soil... in which He grows good Gospel sowers! - JDP*

## II. Q&A Jesus <--> Disciples

### Matthew 13:51

*“Have you understood all these things?”*

*Do you understand all these things?*

*They answered/said to him, “Yes.”*

God’s good soil grows godly souls. – JDP

*According to Jesus, those who live in the kingdom of God are BOTH fruitful AND faithful! – JDP*

*Remember, Jesus said in Matthew 7:18 that the fruit reveals the root of EVERY branch! – JDP*

Finally, faithfulness is **NOT** a default position... it’s a gift of grace, a fruit of the Spirit, a choice and a commitment! – JDP

## III. Q&A Each of Us <--> Jesus

### US to Christ:

1. Why did Jesus come, live, and die?
2. Why did Jesus teach anything to anyone?

3. Why did Jesus start and end with direct teaching?
4. Why did Jesus teach in parables in His middle ministry?
5. Why switch to parables now (*“that same day”*)

### Matthew 12:22-28

**22** Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. **23** And all the people were amazed, and said, “Can this be the Son of David?” **24** But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.” **25** Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. **26** And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? **27** And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. **28** But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

6. Why do some see biblically and others don't?
7. Why do some hear biblically and others don't?
8. Why do some understand biblically and others don't?
9. Why is prophecy used with the parables?
10. Why bother to fulfill the prophecy?

Dull hearts are lukewarm, bad soil hearts... - JDP

11. Why bother proclaiming prophetically today?
12. Why is the kingdom of God a secret or mystery?
13. Why is there more than one kingdom?
14. Why is Satan the ruler over the worldly kingdom?
15. Why is there a heaven & kingdom of heaven?
16. Why is there a hell & eternal damnation?
17. Why do individual responses & choices matter?
18. Why is lukewarmness such a big deal biblically?
19. Why them?
20. Why me?

**VIDEO:** *Parable of the Soils #7*

See again the beauty of biblical...  
sovereign grace & human responsibility!

*Creator Christ... our King and His cross make ALL  
the difference! It's the good, cross-tilled soil that  
proves to produce and BE both faithful &  
fruit-filled soil & sowers! - JDP*

**CHRIST to Us**

1. What do you want... &/or What do you want to BE?
2. ***Who do you want &/or Whose do you want to BE?***
  - i. Do you want the King & to BE in His kingdom?
  - ii. Or do you want Him to come into yours?

3. **Do you understand all these things?**
- i. How do bad hearts happen? (see Hebrews)
  - ii. Why do bad hearts happen?
    - 1. Sin
    - 2. Dull hearts
  - iii. How do good hearts happen? (see m M m)
  - iv. Why do good hearts happen?
    - 1. Grace
    - 2. Faithful Obedience
  - v. What do you call the bad soil/hearts? CROWD
  - vi. What do you call the good: CHURCH/Kingdom
  - vii. We are here to help!
    - 1. See the new **HISbridge FAMILY app!**



2. See the **new Stickman websites:**

**Stickman**  
truth in love

START HERE



1

(CLICK IMAGE)

2

(CLICK IMAGE)

3

(CLICK IMAGE)

3. See the **BRIDGE Family Manifesto:**  
...it's a sharpening stone for the heart



**One FAITH. One FAMILY. One FOCUS.**

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will BE My witnesses (locally, regionally, and globally).” – Acts 1:8*

**One Question:** *WHAT DO YOU WANT?*  
**One Offer:** *COME AND SEE.*  
**One Promise:** *TRUTH IN LOVE!*

**Our Truth-in-Love Distinctives: We are...**

1. Responding to grace & repenting of sin...
2. Trusting the Bible & obeying God's Word...
3. Growing in-Christ & living Spirit-led...
4. Praying for guidance & following by faith...
5. Dying to self & carrying our cross...
6. BE-ing the Church & loving one another...(*truly loving* one another)
7. Equipping the saints & exemplifying supernatural unity...
8. Ministering as ambassadors & discerning matters shrewdly...
9. Worshipping God vertically & experiencing Him horizontally...
10. Proclaiming the Gospel (*no matter what*) & fishing for men...
11. Making disciples-warriors & winning spiritual-warfare...
12. Loving our King & serving His kingdom!

**CLOSE:** How sharp is your heart?  
(How dull?)

*Dull disciples are either drifting, distracted, deceived, delusional... OR **dead/false**... soon to be spit out of the mouth of Christ... “disciples.”*

(cf. John 6:66 & Revelation 3) - JDP

Do you really want to be ruled & reigned over by the Bible's all-everything King?

Do you truly want to BE in God's kingdom?

**Friend, how cross-tilled & sharp is your soil & soul?**

*Moving forward, will you learn, love, & live as one Beholding... Believing... Becoming... & Belonging in the King's kingdom?*

I pray your answer, faith, & fruit all say YES!

**Let's PRAY**

## RESEARCH NOTES:

CONTEXT:

1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3And he told them many things in parables.

### Matthew 12:22-28

22Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. 23And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" 24But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." 25Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 28But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

TEXT:

### ***The Parable of the Sower***

saying: “A sower went out to sow. **4**And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. **5**Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, **6**but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. **7**Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. **8**Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9**He who has ears,<sup>a</sup> let him hear.”

## **Q&A Session 1:**

### ***The Purpose of the Parables***

**10** Then the disciples came and said to him,

**QUESTION:** *“Why do you speak to them in parables?”*

**ANSWER:** **11** *And he answered them,*

**“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. **12**For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. **13** This is why I speak to them in parables,**

because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. **14**Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

““You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

**15 For this people’s heart has grown dull,**

and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed,  
lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

### ***The Parable of the Sower Explained***

18 “Hear then the parable of the sower:

A). 19When 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.

B). 20As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21yet 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.

C). 22As 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.

D). 23As 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.”

## Q&A Session 2: (Matthew 13:51)

**QUESTION** *Have you understood all these things?  
Do you understand all these things?*

**ANSWER:** *They said to him, “Yes.”*

(“these things” = previous 7 parables)  
(The disciple’s “yes” begets Christ’s “therefore” 7 last parable)

THOUGHTS to CONSIDER:

1. Begin with the contextual unpacking of “this day”
  - a. Bookends...
  - b. Introduction of parables
  - c. Was direct teaching... now parables teaching
2. Unpack the righteous aspects of asking Jesus questions...
3. See Christ’s specific answers AND the principled answers
4. Exposit the details in the parable of the soils...

## D.A. Carson on Matthew 13:10-23

### 1) *On understanding parables (13:10–17)*

Matthew’s treatment is not only longer than Mark’s (Mk 4:10–12) and Luke’s (Lk 8:9–10; 10:23–24), but it includes more OT Scripture and is structured with great care.

**The disciples’ question (Mt 13:10) evokes Jesus’ basic answer (vv. 11–12), which is then applied in greater detail first to “them” (vv. 13–15) and then to the disciples (vv. 16–18). The latter two sections are a well-ordered chiasm** whose inversion echoes OT form

(e.g., Ps 89:28–37) and emphasizes the climax of judgment and mercy (so K.E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], pp. 61f.):

Therefore I speak to them in parables,

1 because seeing *they see not* and hearing *they hear not*, nor understand.

2 And it is fulfilled to them the prophecy of Isaiah which says,

- 3 "Hearing you *shall hear* and shall *not understand*,  
and seeing you *shall see* and shall *not perceive*.
- 5 For this peoples *heart is* become dull  
6 and the *ears* are dull of hearing  
7 and their *eyes* they have closed,  
7' lest they should perceive with the *eyes*  
6' and hear with the *ear*
- 5' and understand with the *heart*, and should turn again and I should  
heal them."
- But blessed, are *your eyes*, for they see,  
3' and your *ears*, for they *hear*.
- 2' For truly I *say unto you* that many *prophets* and righteous men  
1' desired to see what you *see*, & *did not see*, & to hear what you *hear*, & *did not hear*.

10 "The disciples" (Mark: "the Twelve and the others around him") approached Jesus, apparently in private (cf. Mark 4:10). If this occurred at the end of the discourse, the plural "parables" would be well accounted for. Kingsbury (*Parables*, pp. 40–41) detects in the verb *proselthontes* ("came to him") a "cultic connotation": the disciples approached Jesus "with the same reverence that would be due to a king or deity." He defends this doubtful view with a prejudicial selection of the evidence that could in some cases be taken that way, while ignoring contrary evidence regarding Matthew's use of the verb (cf. Mt 4:3; 8:19; 9:14; 15:1, 30; 16:1; 17:24; 22:23 et al.).

Recent scholarship rightly sees in this chapter the distinction between the disciples and the crowds, presupposed by the above outline. But there has been a regrettable tendency to think Matthew has absolutized the distinction, idealized the disciples, and played down their lack of understanding (Bornkamm, *Tradition*, pp. 105ff.; Kingsbury, *Parables*, pp. 42ff.; Schmid; Grundmann). This idealization, it is alleged, is very strong in vv. 10–17 and emerges in v. 10. The disciples ask why Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables, not what the parables mean—and this presupposes they already know. But Mark's question is ambiguous (Mark 4:10); Matthew typically has merely clarified the point. The critics' contention is based on an argument from silence. But if the disciples did understand the parable of the sower, why does Jesus proceed in a few verses to give them an explanation (Mt 13:18–23)? And why do they ask for an explanation to a later parable (v. 36)?

The focus of Jesus' reply (vv. 11–17) is not so much on the disciples' understanding as on the fact that the revelation is given to some and not to others and why. (On this recurring question, cf. Trotter.)

## 11–12

*Jesus' answer cannot legitimately be softened: at least one of the functions of parables is to conceal the truth, or at least to present it in a veiled way.*

This point is strengthened if the *hoti* is not “recitative” (equivalent to the quotation marks in NIV) but fully causal, “because.” The disciples ask, “Why do you speak, etc.?” and Jesus replies, “Because the secrets of the kingdom have been given to the disciples but not to others.” The strength of this translation turns not only on its suitability after “Why?” but also on the fact that *hoti* is nowhere else in the NT “recitative” after the particular formula used: *ho de apokritheis eipen* (“he replied,” v. 11; cf. D. Wenham, “Structure,” p. 519, n. 5, and literature there cited). The pronoun *autois* (“to them”) does not refer first to the Jews in Matthew’s day but to “the people” mentioned by the disciples in the previous verse.

*Ta mysteria tēs basileias* (“the secrets of the kingdom”) is not explained; its meaning may be deduced by the context and by the use of *mysterion* (“secret”) elsewhere. *Mysterion* has no obvious connections with pagan mystery religions but reflects a thoroughly Semitic background (cf. R.E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term “Mystery” in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968]). It appears in the OT in Daniel (Aram. *rāz*), which refers to some eschatological secret, some portent of what God has decreed will take place in the future. The Greek term can also reflect the Hebrew *sôḡ* (“secret,” “confidential speech”), taken from the heavenly council (cf. Brown, *Mystery*, pp. 2–6; DNTT, 3:502). The same range of meanings is found in the DSS.

*“Mysteries” are divine plans or decrees, often passed on in veiled language, known only to the elect, and usually relating to eschatological events.*

For the “secrets of the kingdom” to be “given” the disciples suggests that to them certain eschatological realities are being revealed.

What is revealed is not who Jesus is, the nature of God, or the power of love (all of which have been suggested);

rather, the “mystery of the Kingdom is the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation” (Ladd, *Presence*, pp. 219–42, esp. p. 222).

*That God would bring in his kingdom was no secret. All Jews looked forward to it. “The new truth, now given to men by revelation in the person and mission of Jesus, is that the Kingdom which is to come finally in apocalyptic power, as foreseen by Daniel, has in fact entered into the world in advance in a hidden form to work secretly within and among men”*  
(*ibid.*, p. 225, emphasis his).

It is unlikely that the plural “secrets,” as opposed to Mark’s “secret,” refers to everything Jesus has taught (so Kingsbury, *Parables*, pp. 44f.). The strongest reason for the latter view is that some of the parables deal with ethical matters, not eschatology, reflecting, it is argued, the full gamut of Jesus’ teaching (e.g., parables of the hidden treasure, of the pearl, of the unforgiving servant). But in reality all such parables, as we shall see, necessarily presuppose some form of realized eschatology to make their ethical demands meaningful. The plural “secrets” is best accounted for as a typical Matthean preference for the plural (cf. Matt 4:3 Luke 4:3; Matt 8:26-Mark 4:39; Matt 26:15-Mark 14:11; and a regular changing of “crowd” to “crowds” at Matt 12:46; 13:2; 14:22; 15:36; 21:46; 23:1; 27:20), or as a reflection of a non-Markan source (there are several Matt-Luke “minor agreements” against Mark here; for details cf. D. Wenham, “Synoptic Problem”), or perhaps as a reference to the multiple elements bound up with the basic eschatological truth that the age to come has already dawned.

The antithesis of v. 12 is proverbial and repeated elsewhere (25:29; cf. Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18). It warns against taking spiritual blessings for granted and serves to increase gratitude and a sense of privilege among those who continue to enjoy them. What is lost in the second part of

the antithesis is not the law but one's standing as the expected subject of the kingdom (cf. Mt 8:11–12).

**13 Jesus now explicitly applies his answer (vv. 11–12) to those who are not disciples.** Discussion of this verse turns on Matthew's change of *hina* plus subjunctive in Mark 4:12 ("in order that, etc.")—which implies that the parables' blinding outsiders is a function of divine election—to *hoti* ("**because**"), which **means that Jesus speaks in parables because the people are spiritually insensitive.** Though they "see," they do not *really* "see." There are four possible approaches to the above data.

1. Some argue that Matthew's change of *hina* to *hoti* is motivated by his editorial desire to blame the Jews or to establish a moral basis for their being rejected (e.g., Kingsbury, *Parables*, pp. 48–49; Dupont, "Point de vue," pp. 233f.). But this badly oversimplifies the matter because of the strong note on election in the best rendering of v. 11 (above).

2. Others suggest a sort of additive harmonization: "because" (*hoti*, Matt) the willful rejectors refused to see and hear, Jesus spoke to them in parables "in order that" (*hina*, Mark-Luke) they might not (truly) see and hear (Hendriksen). This may be theologically sound, but it is doubtful whether simple addition best explains what Matthew has done.

3. Many attempt to soften the *hina* in Mark to lose its telic force ("in order that") and take on a consecutive force ("with the result that"; cf. NIV's ambiguous "so that"). Mark and Matthew would then be very close in thought in this verse. Certainly *hina* can have consecutive force in Hellenistic Greek, a distinct departure from the classical; but Mark has *hina ... mēpote* (lit., "in order that ... lest"; NIV, "otherwise"), and it is very difficult to give such an expression anything else than full telic force. Moule (*Idiom Book*, p. 143) recognizes the strength of this argument; but because he judges the notion of parables told to prevent any who are not predestined for salvation from hearing "too incongruous with any part of the N.T. period to be plausible," he is forced to appeal to Semitic idiom or even the much later linguistic development of causal *hina*. But attempts to ground Mark's *hina* in a Semitic mistranslation (cf. esp. T.W. Manson, *The Teachings of Jesus*, 2d ed. [Cambridge: University Press, 1935], pp. 76ff.) have proved futile (cf. Gundry, *Use of OT*, pp. 34–35, n. 1; Boucher, pp. 43–44; J. Gnllka, *Die Verstockung Israels* [Mun Shell: Kosel-Verlag, 1961]). And appeals to rabbinic parables and their function have turned out to support the telic view, since rabbis did indeed use parables to mask truth: the rabbinic parable "is not a universalistic form" (D. Daube. "Public Pronouncement and Private Explanation in the Gospels," *ExpT* 57 [1945–46]: 177).

4. Though the last two approaches are not convincing, the first can become plausible if presented with greater awareness of the relationship v. 12 enjoys with v. 11 and v. 13. Verse 11 most likely embraces a strictly predestinarian viewpoint, more strongly than Mark 4:11 and doctrinally, though not verbally, like Mark 4:12. The reply to the disciples' question (Matt 13:10) is thus given in terms of election in v. 11, which is further explained in v. 12. Verse 13

recapitulates the reason for speaking in parables but now frames the reason, not in terms of election, but in terms of spiritual dullness. Matthew has already given Jesus' answer in terms of divine election (v. 11); now he gives the human reason. While this brings him into formal conflict with Mark 4:12, he has already sounded the predestinarian note of Mark 4:12. Here Matthew includes much more material than Mark; and in the ordered structure (see parallelisms, above) that results from the inclusion of such new material, verbal parallels are lost in favor of conceptual ones.

Three broader reflections help resolve the problem.

1. Biblical writers in both the OT and the NT have, on the whole, fewer problems about the tension between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility than do many moderns. This is not because they fail to distinguish purpose and consequence, as many affirm (e.g., Moule, *Idiom Book*, p. 142), but because they do not see divine sovereignty and human responsibility as antitheses. In short they are compatibilists and therefore juxtapose the two themes with little self-conscious awareness of any problem (cf. Gen 50:19–20; Judg 14:4; Isa 10:5–7; Hag 1:12–14; John 11:49–52; cf. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*).

2. Thus, even though he records Jesus' answer in terms of election, Mark does not thereby mean to absolve the outsiders of all responsibility. How could he, in the light of the interpretation of the parable of the sower he records (4:13–20), his record of John's demand for repentance (1:4), and much more? **Matthew has taken up these themes in greater detail because he wishes simultaneously to affirm that what is taking place in the ministry of Jesus is, on the one hand, the decreed will of God and the result of biblical prophecy and, on the other hand, a terrible rebellion, gross spiritual dullness, and chronic unbelief.**

**This places the responsibility for the divine rejection of those who fail to become disciples on their own shoulders while guaranteeing that none of what is taking place stands outside God's control and plan. The same sort of pairing has already been expressed in 11:25–30.**

3. This sheds much light on the parables. It is naive to say Jesus spoke them so that everyone might more easily grasp the truth, and it is simplistic to say that the sole function of parables to outsiders was to condemn them. If Jesus simply wished to hide the truth from the outsiders, he need never have spoken to them. His concern for mission (9:35–38; 10:1–10; 28:16–20) excludes that idea.

*So he must preach without casting his pearls before pigs (7:6). He does so in parables: i.e., in such a way as to harden and reject those who are hard of heart and to enlighten—often with further explanation—his disciples. His disciples, it must be remembered, are not just the Twelve but those who were following him (see on 5:1–12)...*

and who, it is hoped, go on to do the will of the Father (12:50) and do not end up blaspheming the Spirit (12:30–32) or being ensnared by evil more thoroughly than before (12:43–45). **Thus the parables spoken to the crowds do not simply convey information, nor mask it, but challenge the hearers.**

They do not convey esoteric content only the initiated can fathom but present the claims of the inaugurated kingdom and the prospects of its apocalyptic culmination in such a way that its implications are spelled out for those in the audience with eyes to see (overstated but rightly defended by Boucher, pp. 83–84).

*The parables of the soils not only says that the kingdom advances slowly and with varied responses to the proclamation of that kingdom but implicitly challenges hearers to ask themselves what kinds of soil they are.*

Those whose hearts are hardened and who lose what little they have do not participate in the messianic kingdom they have been looking for, and for them the parable is a sentence of doom. Those who have ears to hear, to whom more is given, perceive and experience the dawning of the Messianic Age; and for them the parable conveys the mysteries of the kingdom. In the varied responses given to the challenge of the parables, God's act of judgment and his self-disclosure in Jesus are both seen to be taking place in exactly the same way that various "soils" respond to the "seed," which is the message about the kingdom.

(See further on 15:10–13.)

**14–15** Stendahl and others advance several reasons for taking this quotation as a late gloss on the Gospel, including an anomalous introductory formula, and insist that the quotation is tautologous after v. 13. But parallels to this introductory formula are common in the LXX and other Greek-Jewish literature with which Matthew is familiar, and vv. 14–15 are not strictly tautologous since they go on to stress the theme of fulfillment. Moreover, if Matthew follows (Mark 4:12) in Mt 13:13, it is unlikely that he abridged his source by omitting the entire last

clause of Mark 4:12 (“otherwise they might turn and be forgiven”). The one area where Matthew almost invariably gives more material than the other synoptists is in OT quotations and allusions. “We must rather assume that **Matthew verse 13 leads up to the formal quotation in verses 14, 15**” (Gundry, *Use of OT*, pp. 116–18). These two verses thus become the rough equivalent of Mark 4:12–13.

The text form is LXX (as also in Acts 28:26–27), which follows the MT of Isaiah 6:9–10 pretty closely, except that the LXX is a description of the people, whereas MT makes this a command to the prophet (“Be ever hearing, but never understanding.... Make the heart of this people calloused”). But this is not as significant a change as some have thought; for judging by the prophet’s later messages, the words in Isaiah 6:9–10 are steeped in bitter irony. After all, Isaiah was not given this charge because the result was desirable but because it inevitably came on people who were calloused. So also in Jesus’ day! The Messiah who comes to reveal the Father (Mt 11:25–27) succeeds only in dulling what little spiritual sense many of the people have, for they do not want to turn and be healed. Indeed, the context of Isaiah 6:9–10 reveals that their dullness will continue “until the cities lie ruined ... and the fields ruined and ravaged ... and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste” (Isa 6:11–13). The reference is to the Exile; but the events surrounding the Exile are seen as a paradigm, the classic case of rejection of God and resulting judgment, repeated in Jesus’ generation on a new level and so fulfilling the words of the prophecy. It is unclear whether any claim that Isaiah 6:9–10 has predictive force is implied (if so, see on 2:15). What is certain is the racial connection (cf. also Acts 28:26–27; cf. John 12:38–40): the failure of most Jews to discern spiritual realities was no new thing. Moreover, if **the context of Isaiah 6:9–10 goes with the quotation, a strong hint of judgment accompanies the description.**

The first two lines of the quotation are in the second person plural: the people are directly addressed. But v. 15 gives us God’s description of the people in the third person. This makes it at least possible to interpret the “otherwise” clauses (*mēpote*, “lest”), not as the people’s purpose (they have closed their eyes lest they see and turn and be healed), but as God’s judgment (they have closed their eyes as the result of divine judicial action, otherwise they might see and turn, etc.). The thought then becomes similar to 2 Thessalonians 2:11. Again, of course, neither Jesus nor Matthew would see anything incongruous in God’s judicial hardening (see on 13:13).

**16–17** (For “blessed,” see on 5:3; and cf. Luke 10:23–24.) The disciples were blessed by God and privileged above the crowd because they saw and heard (Mt 13:16) what “many prophets and righteous men” (v. 17; see on 10:40–42) longed to see but did not. The reference is to OT prophets and others who were just before God—people who looked forward to the coming of the kingdom. Here one cannot help but include Simeon (Luke 2:25–35) and

Anna (Luke 2:36–38). Implicitly there is in Jesus' saying a rich christological and eschatological claim: no mere prophet could say as much as he did.

Those who think Matthew idealizes the disciples (see on v. 10) observe that the parallel in Luke 10:23–24 contrasts Jesus' generation with earlier generations but argue that Matthew contrasts the disciples ("your" is emphatic) with the hard people of that same generation (Bornkamm, *Tradition*, p. 107). In fact Matthew does something of both.

Matthew 13:16 in connection with the preceding verses, contrasts the disciples with the calloused crowd; but v. 17 contrasts them with prophets and righteous men of past generations.

*So the crowd in Jesus' day stands in the line of the willfully blind in the OT (vv. 14–15), and Jesus' disciples stand in the line of the prophets (as in 5:11–12).*

**The fulfillment motif is operating, showing that the division taking place in Jesus' time with the coming of the kingdom stands in succession to the divisions already spelled out in the Scriptures.**

The disciples are not idealized; they will later have to ask for an explanation (Mt 13:36). But by contrast with the crowds, they really did follow Jesus and gradually grasped the critical turning point in redemption history Jesus was even then introducing.

## Notes

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- 14 The addition of a cognate participle or a cognate dative to a verb in order to strengthen the verb is a customary way for the LXX to render the Hebrew infinitive absolute (cf. BDF, par. 422; Zerwick, par.

369). Both are found here in this LXX quotation: ἀκοῆ ἀκούσετε (*akoē akousete*, lit., “in hearing you will hear”), βλέποντες βλέψετε (*blepontes blepsete*, lit., “seeing you will see”) In English these are confusing tautologies, and their meaning is rightly rendered by NIV: “You will be ever hearing,” or “you will be hearing acutely,” etc.

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## (2) Interpretation of the parable of the soils (13:18–23)

Jeremias (*Parables*, p. 62) thinks the interpretation provided in all three Gospels (cf. Mark 4:14–20; Luke 8:11–15) is a later church creation, but we have already questioned the cogency of some of his criteria. Payne (“Authenticity”) has taken up the points in question and offered comprehensive rejoinders, some of which will be noted below. Here it is enough to say that (contra Jeremias, *Parables*, p. 79) not every point in the parable is interpreted allegorically: no explanation is given of the sower, the path, the rocky ground, or the diverse yield. What “allegorical” points are scored emerge naturally from the story (even the identification of the birds: see on 13:19), once the main point of the extended metaphor is established.

*The general point is that the “message about the kingdom” (v. 19) receives a varied reception among various people, and that during this time of difficulty and frustration there is an implied delay while the seed produces in some soils its various yields.*

The interpretation therefore demands that each person look to himself as to how he “hears” the message.

Broadus cites Chrysostom: “Mark this, I pray thee that the way of destruction is not one only, but there are differing ones, and wide apart from one another. Let us not soothe ourselves upon our not perishing in all these ways, but let it be our grief in whichever way we are perishing.”

**18** The *hymeis* (“you”) is probably emphatic: in light of the great privilege extended to you, which prophets and righteous men wanted to enjoy and the calloused spurn, *you* listen.

**19** Matthew omits “The farmer sows the word” (Mark 4:14) and plunges right into the significance of the various soils. This does not mean that he is concerned with the ecclesiastical implications at the expense of the christological ones (so Kingsbury, *Parables*, p. 72), since Mark himself does not identify the sower as Jesus. If he here depends on Mark, Matthew simplifies to get to the point. But D. Wenham (“Interpretation”) has provided a plausible source reconstruction that would invalidate redaction-critical conclusions in this pericope that depend on Markan priority. Possibly Matthew and Mark share a common source.

Neither “word” (Mark) nor “word of the kingdom” (Matt; NIV, “message about the kingdom”) indicates later ecclesiastical tradition (cf. Payne, “Authenticity,” pp. 178–79; contra Jeremias, *Parables*, pp. 77f.; Hill, *Matthew*). On the change from “word” to “word of the kingdom,” compare Matthew’s “gospel of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35; 24:14). More difficult is the mixed metaphor: the seed appears to be “the message about the kingdom,” but in the last sentence of the verse it is *ho para tēn hodon spareis* (lit., “he who was sown along the path”); NIV has smoothed out the difficulty by treating the masculine participle as if it were neuter).

A similar problem occurs in Mark’s parallel. Several ways for resolving the problem have been suggested. Box and McNeile are among those who take the text literally but think there is a purposeful link between the seed and human character, which grows from the seed. But surely the point of this part of the parable is that the seed is taken away before it has time to grow. Others have suggested some sort of ellipsis: “This is [the situation of] the seed sown along the path,” understanding “This” to refer to the situation, not the seed or the person, which would also explain vv. 20–23, though the masculine *houtos* (“this”), instead of the neuter, is somewhat surprising. Alexander and Hendriksen therefore opt for a fairly complex ellipsis: “He is the one that [in his reaction to the message resembles the reaction of the ground to the seed that] was sown along the path”—which is possible but rather finely drawn.

D. Wenham (“Interpretation”) offers a complex but plausible source-critical solution; Payne (“Authenticity,” pp. 172–77) proposes an underlying Aramaic too literally translated and observes that the Greek can be understood to mean, not “this is he who was sown along the path,” but “this is the man who received the seed along the edge of the path” (JB; cf. NASB), understanding the passive participle *ho spareis* to mean, not “the one [seed] sown,” but “the one [*soil*] sown.” C.F.D. Moule (“Mark 4:1–20 Yet Once More,” in Ellis and Wilcox, p. 112) has shown that the ambiguity is no indication that the interpretation is secondary; the same thing occurs in Colossians 1:6, 10, where the metaphor of growing and bearing fruit is applied first to the seed sown and then to the ground in which it is sown.

Two further features of this verse require explanation.

1. The words “in his heart” make the heart the place of decision, the center of personality (see on 5:8). Kingsbury (*Parables*, p. 55) is wrong to conclude from this that the person in view actually becomes a Christian and church member and then rejects the message. He argues that the words “when anyone hears the message about the kingdom” is “tantamount to saying that he becomes a Christian.” The conclusion is untenable if one considers the next words: “and does not understand it” (cf. the same verbs in 13:13–14). The hunt for anachronisms can distort scholarly judgment.

2. The evil one (cf. 6:13; 12:45; 13:38–39), called “Satan” in Mark 4:15 and “the devil” in Luke 8:12; has been symbolized by the birds, a point Via (*Parables*, p. 8) uses to argue that this interpretation goes beyond the range of the natural and understandable symbolism inherent in the parable and must therefore be judged guilty of falling into allegorizing. In fact, close study of birds as symbols in the OT and especially in the literature of later Judaism shows that birds regularly symbolize evil and even demons or Satan (cf. b. *Sanhedrin* 107a; cf. Rev 18:2).

## Jesus' interpretation is clear.

*Some people hear the message about the kingdom; but like hardened paths, they do not let the truth penetrate, and before they really understand it the devil has snatched it away.*

### 20–21

The language of these verses is often taken to reflect the apostolic age, not Jesus (cf. Jeremias, *Parables*). But “root” (v. 21) is appropriate to the extended agricultural metaphor, and “persecution” is amply treated by Jesus elsewhere in nonparabolic settings (e.g., 5:10–12, 43–44; 10:16–25; 24:9; see further Payne, “Authenticity,” pp.

177–80). Jesus’ interpretation is coherent. The person who receives “the word” (same Gr. word as “message” in 13:19) in a thoughtless way may show immediate signs of life and promise to be the best of the crop: he receives the truth “with joy” (v. 20). But without real root, there is no fruit; and external pressures, trouble, and persecution (cf. 24:9, 21, 29), like sun beating on a rootless plant, soon reveal the shallowness of this soil.

“At once” (euthys) he receives the word with joy, and as “quickly” (euthys) “falls away” (for skandalizetai, see on 5:29).

Such temporary disciples are always numerous in times of revival and were so in Jesus’ ministry (cf. comments on 12:32).

**22 This person does not hear the word “with joy” (as in v. 20) but simply never permits the message about the kingdom to control him: life has too many other commitments that slowly choke the**

**struggling plant, which never matures and bears fruit.**

The competing “thorns” are summed up under two headings—  
the **worries of this life** (lit., this “age,” as opposed to the age to come; see on  
6:25–34) and **“the deceitfulness of wealth.”**

The latter category, *hē apatē tou ploutou*, may possibly be rendered “the delight in wealth,” since in late Greek *apatē*, which earlier meant “deceitfulness,” came to mean “pleasure” or “delight,” usually involving sin (e.g., 2 Peter 2:13; cf. BAGD, s.v.).

*The idea is clear: worries about worldly things or devotion to wealth (cf. 1 Tim 6:9) snuff out spiritual life.*

If “deceit” is understood, there is an added warning that these “thorns” are so subtle that one may not be aware of the choking that is going on. The warning is timeless.

Moreover it is as unconvincing to deduce from this verse that Matthew’s church was wealthy (contra Kilpatrick, *Origins*, pp. 124ff.; Kingsbury, *Parables*, p. 61) as to deduce from 6:28–32 that his church was poverty-stricken.

**What must be avoided is unfruitfulness, for only fruitfulness, not its opposite, indicates spiritual life** (cf. John 15:1–8).

*This person finds “all the seeming good effect is gone, leaving the soul a very thicket of thorns” (Broadus).*

**23** By contrast with the negative results of the preceding verses, **we now come to the person who hears the word and understands it**

(thus reverting to the categories of Isa 6:9–10 used in Matthew 12:13–15, 19). The use of *synienai* (“to understand”) in vv. 19, 23, a verb not found in the Markan parallels, has led some to say that “understanding” is a fundamental characteristic of discipleship in Matthew, and that his disciples have again become idealized (see on v. 10): they are made to “understand” more than the disciples really did at this point in their pilgrimage (cf. Bornkamm, *Tradition*, p. 107; Schniewind; Kingsbury, *Parables*, pp. 61f.). But this may be premature. Certainly *synienai* with its nine occurrences is an important part of Matthew’s vocabulary. But Mark uses *synienai* six times, in a book about two-thirds the length of Matthew.

David Wenham has shown that granted Matthew’s syntax in v. 19, he could not very well have omitted *synienai* (“to understand”) there (“Interpretation,” pp. 308f. n. 5). Its use in v. 23 picks up the Isaiah quotation given more briefly in Mark. Moreover v. 23 does not apply the verb directly to the disciples but interprets the parable aphoristically; and in so doing it is

merely in line with Mark’s “hear the word, *accept it*” (4:20). **In this chapter the disciples are distinguished from the crowd; but their understanding is only relatively better (13:36)**, and they are not idealized. Misunderstanding of this point springs from too ready a willingness to read the later church into every phrase of the parable and from a failure to recognize the absolute categories that any competent preacher, including Jesus, uses (see on 6:5–8).

**The interpretation, like the parable itself, ends positively. And we must not fail to notice that the**

soil that produces only a small crop is nevertheless called “good” (cf. 25:22–23).

## Notes

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- 23 The particle *δή* (*dē*, used for various kinds of emphasis) is normally employed in the NT in sentences of command or exhortation. This is the sole NT exception (though there are good classical parallels): “he is just the man who, etc.” (cf. BDF, par. 451 [4]). The anomaly has prompted a variant reading in the Western textual tradition.