

***The Kingdom of Heaven—Proclamation and Response:  
The Parable Discourse (13:1–53)***  
(Mark 4)

**An Outline on the Matthew 13 Parables**

(1) ***The Threefold Parable of the Sower***: The Parable Itself, The Purpose of the Parables, and The Interpretation of the Parable (vv. 1–23),

(2) ***The Three Parables of Things***: The Weeds, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven (vv. 24–35); and then, separated by the buffer of The Interpretation of the Parable of the Weeds (where a new focus on the disciples begins),

(3) ***The Three Parables of the End***: The Hid Treasure, The Pearl of Great Price, and The Net (vv. 36–52).<sup>1</sup>

“Matthew links the parabolic discourse in Matthew chapter 13 to the preceding controversies....”<sup>2</sup> *These parables will illustrate the preceding disputes.* In other words, **take note of the greater context.** “Following from the portrayal in chs. 11–12 of **the varied responses in Galilee to Jesus and his preaching of the kingdom of heaven**, the parables of this discourse tackle the natural question why this should be so.”<sup>3</sup>

**Teaching by the Lake (13:1–3a)**

***Matthew 13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.***

***That same day....*** “On that day’ ... provides continuity from the previous scene....”<sup>4</sup> This would be the same day as covered by the events of chapter 12 and right after his family approached him in the house (12:46-50).

***Jesus went out of the house....*** When did he enter the house? We do not know. In 12:22 we see Jesus healing a blind and mute man. Was he inside a house when he did that? In hind sight, it does appear that he was. If so, then “all the people” (12:23) and the “Pharisees” (12:24) were there as well. In 12:46 we notice that Jesus’ mother and brothers “stood outside” so at that point Jesus is inside.

---

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 300). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>3</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 499). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>4</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 522). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

**sat beside the sea....** “A Capernaum home base for Jesus means that he plays out a considerable part of his ministry in and around the Sea of Galilee.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, he is known by many as “the man of Galilee.”

**Matthew 13:2 And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach.**

**great crowds....** The use of the word **great** might suggest that the scene has changed from a few people and Pharisees, which watch the healing of a blind and mute man in the house (12:22), to one that now included “**great crowds**.” From 12:46 we see that many more were “outside” not able to get “inside” where Jesus was healing and debating with the Pharisees. Now that Jesus is “outside” **great crowds** have access to him.



**he got into a boat...on the beach....** “The setting is probably intended to be the shore at Capernaum, where Jesus’ home now was.”<sup>6</sup> The mention of a **beach** suggests Jesus was not in town but the mention of a **boat** and the great crowds suggests he was close to the town.

**sat down....** This introduction is “very much like the setting given at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–2) where the crowds and the disciples were

---

<sup>5</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 523). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>6</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 502). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

present, and Jesus sat down to teach (Matt 13:2).<sup>7</sup> Both are followed by major teaching sections.

**Matthew 13:3a** *And he told them many things in parables, saying:*

**parables....** “A parable is a relatively short narrative with symbolic meaning.”<sup>8</sup> The word parable consists of two Greek words *βολή* [*bolé*], “to throw or to cast” and *παρα* [*pará*], “alongside of.” The speaker cast a story alongside of an idea that is not quite clear. By comparing the correspondence of the story with the idea under discussion, the reader gains an understanding that would not be possible without this “illustration”.

Or we might put it this way, “a parable is “a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt of its precise application to tease it into active thought.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Introductory Parable: The Sower (13:3b-9)**

(Mark 4:3-9)

**Matthew 13:3b** *[Look] A sower went out to sow.*

**Look**<sup>10</sup> “The *deep* point of the entire parable is in these two framing words: “*Look* at what Jesus is saying and *listen* [13:9] to what he means! Your life depends on this!”<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew* (ed. Watson E. Mills and George Wesley Buchanan; vol. 1 & 2; The Mellen Biblical Commentary; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 585.

<sup>8</sup> *parables παραβολή* “...a relatively short narrative with symbolic meaning—‘parable, figure, allegory, figure of speech.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Look ἰδοὺ* “...prompters of attention, which serve also to emphasize the following statement—‘look, listen, pay attention, come now, then.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 811.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 5.



**sower....** Interestingly, “The parable mentions the sower but is not further concerned about him.”<sup>12</sup>

**to sow....** “In line with typical ancient practice we are to imagine the seed being scattered by hand from a bag slung over the shoulder.... The typical sower in first-century Palestine was a subsistence farmer with a limited plot of land at his disposal.”<sup>13</sup>

**Matthew 13:4** *And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them.*

The focus on what follows is not on the sower or the seed **but on the various types of soil that the seed is sown on**. The farmer did not intentionally sow seed on paths, rocky ground and among thorns; this was simply the by-product of casting seed to the wind by hand, the normal way of sowing in that day.

**along the path....** The path is where people walked along the perimeter of the field. It would be packed very hard through years of using that “way” to travel to other fields or other places of the farm. “On the path the seed is particularly vulnerable to the birds because each grain is clearly visible; it cannot slip into the unevenness’s and the broken texture of the normal soil in the field.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 240.

<sup>13</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 525). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>14</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 526). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.



**Matthew 13:5 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, Matthew 13:6 but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.**

**rocky ground....** “In many places in the Palestinian hill country the layer of topsoil over the rock is thin but not yet eroded, so that one sows on it. This seed sprouts, but it is dried out by the sun and withers.”<sup>15</sup>

**since they had no root....** “...there is no depth of soil for the root system to spread out into. As the plants lose moisture to the heat of the sun, their root systems are inadequate to draw in sufficient fresh moisture. The plants soon lose the battle and wither up.”<sup>16</sup>

**Matthew 13:7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.**

**the thorns grew up....** “...this time the danger comes not from the inadequate resources in the soil, but from competition. The luxuriant growth of the thorns shows that there is nothing wrong with the soil here; the problem is that it is **already occupied** and there is no room for a new type of vegetation....”<sup>17</sup>

*“For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.” (Jeremiah 4:3, ESV)*

“There has thus been a progression in the first three scenes....”<sup>18</sup> “If the seed on or beside the road never germinates, and if the seed on rocky soil springs up only for the briefest period, the seed among thorns grows some time before it is overcome. Thus the lifetime of the various seeds becomes greater as one moves toward the parable’s climax.”<sup>19</sup>

**Matthew 13:8 Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.**

“There can be little doubt that the sowing of the seed represents the ministry of Jesus (and ultimately its continuation through the disciples). Other renewal groups [Essenes, monastics, etc.], convinced that they had the truth, were inclined to a greater or lesser extent to **withdraw into holy remnants**. Jesus, noted for a similar and even greater

---

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 241.

<sup>16</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 527). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>17</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 505). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>18</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 505). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>19</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (vol. 2; International Critical Commentary; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 384.

confidence that he had the truth from God, **sowed extravagantly**, acting as a friend and teacher to all sorts of people, not at all worried that people might waste his efforts and convinced that **God would see to the bounty of the crop.**<sup>20</sup> This sets an example for us, do not concern yourself as to whether a person might respond or not, just sew, God will ensure the harvest.

**Matthew 13:9 “He who has ears, let him hear.”**

“In relation to parables it constitutes a challenge to **discern the meaning of a cryptic utterance**, and its wording echoes the theology of revelation which will be spelled out in 13:10–17: not everyone does have “ears to hear” and it is only to those who do and who exercise them that revelation will be successful.”<sup>21</sup>

Earlier, Jesus was speaking plainly so that anyone could understand. When the religious leaders of the nation did understand, they accused him of being in league with Satan, rejected his message and tried to murder him. With that as the background for this chapter, Jesus now speaks cryptically in parables. He is not at all clear and it requires thought and analysis and most importantly it requires a heart inclined toward God to understand him.

“The key words for understanding this parable as responsibility are its last words: “*Let the person who has ears to hear—listen!*” (13:9). This sentence is not just a rhetorical flourish meaning “Get the point!” Rather, it is the code for deciphering the parable’s vocabulary. Listening to Jesus’ words is the key to life; our ears are the soil of our lives. Ears attentively devoted to the Word of Jesus are good soil; ears distracted, inattentive, casual, or diffused in concentration are the several unfruitful soils of the parable. The key attitude in life—spiritually and socially—is the attitude of active listening. Right *listening* is the catalyst for right *doing*. Just as soil is primarily passive and its task mainly receptive, so disciples are to be first of all *receivers*.... *Then* faithful listeners to God’s Word become fruitful servants of God’s world. Truly passive reception becomes truly active righteousness. In Paul’s language, faith becomes works. In the final sentence of Jesus’ Interpretation of the Parable (13:23), see the vital connection between “understanding” (“standing under”), which is Matthew’s word for faith in the Parables, and “fruitbearing” and “doing,” which are Matthew’s ethical words for love in the Parables and throughout the Gospel.”<sup>22</sup>

**“...the key responsibility in life is to *listen* with one’s life to the Seed of the Word of God.”<sup>23</sup>**

<sup>20</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 530). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>21</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 432). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 8.

