

## Matthew 13:10-17 – “Kingdom Mysteries”

(Pew Bible Page: 818)

**Intro:** Parables! What are they? How are they best interpreted? What is their purpose? Why did Jesus use so many parables in His teaching? Tonight, we begin a series of studies in Matthew 13 – a chapter composed almost entirely of parables concerning the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. Since parables are going to occupy the next few week’s lessons, it seemed good to me to begin our studies in verses 10-17 for there Jesus explained to His disciples His purpose for teaching the truths of the kingdom through parables. Why did Jesus teach these truths in parables rather than speaking plainly? What is meant by “mysteries of the kingdom”? What are parables and how can we best understand their teaching? Tonight, we’ll try to unpack the answers to those questions and perhaps a bit more. Let’s begin with the big idea:

**Proposition:** Kingdom mysteries belong to kingdom people so we should diligently seek to understand the parables of the kingdom.

Billboard:	(vv.10-13)	Mystery
	(vv.14-15)	Blindness
	(vv.16-17)	Timing

(vv.10-13) Mystery – Jesus began His discussion of a specific subject, “The Mysteries of the Kingdom,” by telling a parable to the crowd that most of us are familiar with: “The Parable of the Sower,” or better, “The Parable of the Soils.” Lord willing, we will study that parable in depth next week, but for tonight it is only necessary to point out that that parable is the only parable in the chapter that Jesus uttered publicly. Following His speaking the parable in verses 1-9, Jesus and His disciples seem to have retired into a house or some private setting, and in that place the disciples began to question Jesus about the meaning of the parable, but also as we find here in verse 10, **Matthew 13:10 - 10** *Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”* The disciples, who were used to hearing Jesus speak privately with them in very plain language, were naturally curious as to why He suddenly changed His technique in front of the crowd. It’s a very reasonable question, isn’t it? Why not just say plainly what you mean? Why lapse into parables, which can often be confusing, obscure, and hard to interpret? What is a parable anyway? And how can we feel sure that we are properly interpreting its meaning? Let’s begin with a little background.

What is a parable? Here’s what “*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*” says: “A parable [is a story] constructed so as to present to the hearer a real, familiar situation of life in which he can make a judgment often about one main point, and by this judgment on the total impression made by the parable he can be led to understand the one main message which the parable was designed to convey to him (cf. 2 Samuel 12:1-6).”<sup>1</sup> Let’s unpack that a little. A parable is a story taken from real life situations that is used to teach us one main lesson. It’s important for us to remember that last part, “one main lesson,” because we often miss the whole lesson a parable intends to convey by trying to make the parable carry too much meaning. We allegorize. We seek hidden, esoteric meanings. We look for symbolisms. And when we do those things, we inevitably end up in the theological weeds. When we understand that a parable is about one thing, and we’ve found that one thing, then we are on good interpretive ground. Isn’t there sometimes allegorical meaning? Aren’t there sometimes symbols? Couldn’t there be other hidden meanings? The answer is maybe yes or maybe no, but until you understand the one thing the

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<sup>1</sup> Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, pg. 392.

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parable is trying to teach, you’ve missed the point of the parable. Once you know the main point, you can explore other things in the parable that might add richness to that message.

Jesus’ answer to the disciple’s question, “*Why do you speak to them in parables,*” comes next in verse 11: **Matthew 13:11 - 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.* His answer may be surprising, but it is unmistakable. He said, “I teach in parables to instruct you, and hide these truths from them.” Parables instruct some but hide from view the things being taught to others. The intent of a parable is to get certain truths to certain audiences, while keeping others in the audience from understanding altogether. To understand why Jesus taught in parables in this case, it’s important to understand what He was talking about: The secrets, or mysteries, of the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God. Jesus intended those mysteries for His disciples alone. To the crowd He had nothing to say beyond, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” That is what Jesus meant when He followed verse 11 saying, **Matthew 13:12 - 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.* The disciples were the “haves,” and the crowd were the “have nots.”

To understand this, it is good for us to think about what Jesus meant by “*the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*” The kingdom of heaven has been defined as, “*The sphere in which God’s kingly rule is gladly accepted.*”<sup>2</sup> The disciples were the “haves” because they gladly accepted God’s king, Jesus, and God’s kingly rule through Jesus. The crowds were the “have nots” because though willing to hear Jesus speak and witness His miraculous kingdom powers, they were not willing to receive Him as king. They remained outside the kingdom, so the mysteries of the kingdom were not for them. Indeed, until anyone heeds Jesus’ call to “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,*” they can receive nothing. And, said Jesus, **Matthew 13:13 - 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.*

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The mysteries of the kingdom are given only to those who gladly receive the King.

[ILLUSTRATION] A young Chinese believer was passionate about preaching the Bible in the villages of 1920’s China. He pursued an itinerate ministry of preaching, going from village to village and preaching his heart out day after day, but to his dismay, often to little effect. One day he noticed an interesting fact. In many villages there were old women who could not read the Bible, but still seemed to have a vibrant faith and a wonderful knowledge of Christ. As he reflected on this, the young man came to an insightful conclusion: “A vast knowledge of the Bible will never make up for a small knowledge of Jesus.”

[APPLICATION] Receiving wisdom and understanding from God begins by receiving the Savior. How many in our world today pour over the Bible fruitlessly; search commentaries endlessly; read devotionals relentlessly – and yet, **2 Timothy 3:7 - 7** *always learning... [they are] never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.* The mysteries of the kingdom are given only to those who gladly receive the King.

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<sup>2</sup> Alistair Begg

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(vv.14-15) Blindness – Jesus went on to explain that the spiritual blindness the crowd was suffering from was entirely a blindness of their own making. **Matthew 13:14 - 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.’ ”* Isaiah had prophesied about Jesus’ generation when he predicted that they would flock to hear Jesus speak, but be unwilling to understand what He was saying; that they would rush to see Him do miracles, but refuse to perceive His kingship. Notice in verse 15 that Jesus lays the cause of this blindness squarely on their own shoulders: **Matthew 13:15 - 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.’* The crowd had hardened their own heart, stopped their own ears, made themselves intentionally blind. Why? *“Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”* They wanted to hear the beautiful words; they wanted to be titillated by the supernatural miracles; but what they did not want was for Jesus to be king of their lives. Jesus spoke about this in **John 3:19–20 - 19** *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.* Because the crowd was unwilling to accept Him, Jesus refused to cast His pearls before swine. That’s an expression that means, *“To offer something valuable or good to someone who does not know its value.”*<sup>3</sup> Note it again carefully: God has nothing to say to those who refuse His kingly rule other than, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* He is willing to save (*“I would heal them”*), but not to cast His pearls before swine.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Those who refuse God’s kingly rule are fully responsible for their own spiritual blindness.

[ILLUSTRATION] “You’ve cut your nose off to spite your face!” We say that when someone’s trials are a result of their own choices and actions.

[APPLICATION] Spiritual blindness is a case of cutting off one’s own nose to spite one’s face. Refusing Jesus as King, people choose to go it on their own. Our world is full of this today! How many are dabbling in mysticisms; deceived by philosophies; consumed in navel gazing “look within yourself to find the answer” rubbish. God is willing to fix all of that. *“I would heal them,”* He says, if only they would give up on themselves. The secret to escaping the madness is brutal honesty about yourself, and radical dependence on the King. Any other pathway only leads to futility, and those who choose it are fully responsible for their own lostness.

(vv.16-17) Timing – So much for the crowd. Now Jesus turned His remarks back to the situation of His disciples – those who gladly accepted His kingly rule. **Matthew 13:16 - 16** *But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.* The parables were for His disciples. Those who follow the King have the right to understand the mysteries of the kingdom we’ll be looking into in the coming weeks, and this is a blessing granted to us from God. The disciples were permitted to understand but that raises a question. What about all those who gladly accepted God’s kingly rule before Jesus arrived? Weren’t they entitled to receive these things just as much as the Jesus’ disciples and you and me? Jesus’

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<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Dictionary

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answer is, “It wasn’t time yet.” **Matthew 13:17 - 17** *For 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.*

To understand this, we need to see why the mysteries of the kingdom were not revealed until the King finally arrived. Every good Jew knew that Messiah would come someday, and everyone knew that when He came, His kingdom would come on earth. Everyone expected that Messiah would set up an eschatological kingdom that would reign over the earth from sea to shining sea. That kingdom would be an *earthly* kingdom and it would come at the end of time. But the mystery of the kingdom, the unknown truth that didn’t become known until Jesus arrived is this: Wherever the King reigns, the kingdom has already come. When Jesus came to earth, the kingdom came with Him. And it has never left. The kingdom has come wherever Jesus reigns in the hearts of His people. Will there be an earthly kingdom some day? Oh, yes! You can count on that. But “*Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you*”<sup>4</sup> said Jesus, and this was not understood until the time had come and the King arrived. Once He had come, the mysteries of the kingdom could be unpacked for the benefit of all who gladly accepted His kingly reign. And that is what we’ll be doing in our studies of the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The time has come for God’s people to understand the mysteries of the kingdom.

[ILLUSTRATION] “You get what you pay for,” is a proverb intended to encourage us to put in the effort necessary to acquire what we earnestly desire. If you want something badly enough, you’ll plunk down the resources to get your hands on it.

[APPLICATION] Since God has granted to His people the mysteries of the kingdom, we should rejoice and diligently apply ourselves to the study of these parables. It is God’s will that we understand the principles Jesus taught His disciples in the parables of the kingdom. Each parable helps us understand the present nature of the kingdom today. They are encouragements to our daily life in an increasingly chaotic world. They give us understanding of what is going on around us today and help us anticipate what is coming tomorrow. They explain why some hear without being changed; why some fall away; why some seem fruitless though they’ve professed the faith for years; and why some abound amazingly in fruitfulness. In short, these parables equip us for life in the Now as we wait for life in the Not Yet.

**Conclusion:** And so, our study begins. In the coming weeks we’ll look in detail at the things Jesus wants His disciples to keep in mind as we await His return. I look forward to sharing these precious truths, and I pray that you will be greatly helped and encouraged by the things we will learn together.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 17:21