

# The Scheme of the Discourse

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The sermon discusses Jesus' view of His Kingdom and its realization in the world, emphasizing the Church's responsibility to evangelize the world and the ultimate goal of the Kingdom of Heaven.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 13:3-9, Matthew 13:18-33, Matthew 13:44-52

**Topics:** "Evangelism", "The Kingdom of God"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan explores the nature of God's Kingdom as presented in Jesus' parables, emphasizing that these stories illustrate the Kingdom's manifestation during the current age rather than its ultimate realization. He warns against misinterpreting the parables as depicting the final state of the Kingdom, highlighting that they reflect the ongoing struggle between good and evil. Morgan outlines the importance of understanding the context and limitations of these parables, which reveal both the challenges faced and the responsibilities of believers in their time. He concludes that the Church's mission is to evangelize rather than convert the world, preparing for a future age of divine justice and righteousness.

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## Transcript

In this discourse we have the King's own view of His Kingdom, as to its history in the age which He initiated. Many mistakes have been made in the interpretation of these parables through forgetfulness of the limitation of the subject, as here discussed. To imagine that the pictures given reveal the Kingdom in its deepest meaning, or portray its ultimate realization, is to utterly misinterpret the value and intention of the scheme.

The Kingdom of God in its fundamental ideal and ultimate realization is infinitely greater than any condition revealed in the process of these parables. In human history there have been already different phases of manifestation, and various degrees of realization of that Kingdom amongst men. Beyond the particular age in which we live, there will be, according to the teaching of Scripture, manifestations more perfect and far more glorious than anything our eyes have yet seen. In these parables the King deals only with the manifestation and method of progress in this age of God's Kingdom.

The first parable is not introduced by any direct reference to the Kingdom. It is simply the story of the initial work of sowing. Then immediately Jesus proceeds in a series of other parables to refer to the issues of that work throughout the age. That the application of these parables is limited to the age He initiated is clearly manifest in the phrases with which the King introduces each parable, excepting the first and last. The second parable, that of the two sowings, is introduced by the words, "The Kingdom of Heaven is

likened unto," and the remaining ones by the words, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto." The first phrase means "The Kingdom of Heaven has become like unto," the expression suggesting the changing manifestations of the Kingdom in succeeding generations. The second phrase implies simply the manifestation of the Kingdom in the generation then present.

What this limit of application is, is made perfectly clear as the discourse proceeds. Twice does Jesus refer to the "end of the world" (vers. 39 and 49). In each case a far more correct and helpful translation is that suggested by the revisers in the margin, "the consummation of the age." Thus the pictures of the Kingdom are pictures of conditions obtaining between the moment in which Jesus spoke and the consummation of the age--meaning not the end of the world in the sense of the dissolution of the material universe, but the completion of the period which began with His first advent, and which will be closed by His second.

A general survey of the discourse reveals three principal divisions. First (vers. 1-35), "Jesus went out of the house" and uttered four parables in the hearing of the multitudes. Second (vers. 36-50), Jesus, "left the multitudes, and went into the house," and spoke to His disciples parables which were of a different nature from those already spoken to the crowd. Third (vers. 51-53), Jesus addressed Himself to His disciples concerning their responsibility during the age.

Of these parables the King Himself gave the explanation of two. In each case the explanation was to His own disciples.

The first explanation, that of the parable of the sower, was given in the hearing of the multitude. The second explanation, that of the two sowings, was given to the disciples privately.

In preparation for a more detailed study of the parables, it is of great importance to state certain necessary canons of interpretation. Let me first name these, and then consider them a little more particularly.

Simplicity of interpretation, for remembering the intention of the parable, the simplest interpretation is the most likely to be the true one.

Restriction in application of the pictures to the limits clearly marked by the King.

A consistent use of the figurative terms employed, both within the system and with the general use of Scripture, except where specifically otherwise stated.

With regard to the first canon, it is quite possible to examine these parables of Jesus, as it is possible to examine His miracles, with a desire to find hidden depths and hidden meanings. That there are such in all of them, I do not deny, for the simplest thing Jesus said was in itself of the essence of eternal truth, and may have a thousand applications. I hold, however, that in our study it is better to interpret them in the light of the multitudes to whom they were addressed. Seeing that He spoke, not to hide spiritual truth, but to reveal it, we may take it for granted that the sublimest meaning is also the simplest.

As regards the second, it must be remembered that we shall utterly miss the real value of this discourse if we attempt to make any of the parables include the whole fact of the establishment and administration of God's Kingdom. We must recognize from the beginning that they are pictures of one age, and remember that that age is not final.

Upon the third canon I desire to lay special emphasis. The figurative terms of these parables are used consistently within the system. That is to say that Jesus was true to His own figures, and used them in one

sense only. Personally I believe that to be a principle, not merely in the teaching of Jesus, but throughout the whole of Scripture. I am convinced that to ignore the symbolism of numbers and colours and forms in Scripture is to lose one of the most interesting keys to the study of the Word; but I think many of the fanciful interpretations of many parts of Scripture would have been avoided if this simple principle had been observed. So important do I hold it to be that I desire at once to gather out from the parables some of the figures which Jesus used, and which at first sight may appear to have different significations, but which, as a matter of fact, have always the same value and intention. We read of the sower, the seed, the birds, the soil, the sun, the thorns, the fruit, an enemy, reapers or servants, the harvest, a tree, leaven, meal, a woman, treasure, a man, a merchant, a pearl, a net, the seashore, fish; and although some of these illustrations are repeated in different parables, it will be seen, as we continue our study of them, that their significance never changes. The figure always stands for the same truth, in whatever parable it is found.

The sower is found in three parables, in the first, in that of the darnel, and in that of the mustard seed, and when we come to their particular interpretation we shall find that the sower in each represents the same Person, the Son of Man.

Again in the same connection, we find the figure of seed sown, and with the exception of the bad seed, which is distinctly so called and thus differentiated from the other, it has a uniform significance in all connections.

The figure of birds is used in the parable of the sower, and in that of the mustard seed. It is a mistake to interpret it as symbolic of evil in the first, and of good in the second. In both parables, birds are symbols of evil.

Again the soil appears in the parable of the sower, in that of the darnel, in that of the mustard seed, and in that of the treasure. It has always the same meaning, and this meaning is once given, "the field is the world."

Fruit is found in the parables of the sower and the darnel, and in each case must be interpreted according to the seed. Reapers or servants are found in the parables of the darnel and the net, and in each case represent angels associated at the end of the age in administrative justice with the King Himself. The harvest is referred to in the parables of the darnel and of the net, and in both cases refers to the end of the age.

Then lastly we have illustrations which do not repeat in the discourse, but which are used in other parts of the Bible. Thorns are here, as everywhere, symbols of evil. A tree is here, as always, a symbol of great and wide-spread worldly power. As in every other case in Scripture, so here, leaven must be the type of evil. The meal here must be considered as the three measures, and thus its identification with the meal offering of the ancient economy is seen. Treasure is found in one parable, and it can only be explained in conjunction with the parable of the pearl. Thus I maintain that in order to an understanding of these matchless parables of Jesus, we must recognize the perfect consistency of Jesus in His use of figures.

Let us now turn to a general survey of the main divisions and particular parables, and the teachings contained in each. The first four parables (one and three) were spoken wholly to the crowds, and reveal the Kingdom from the human standpoint. The second four parables (three and one) were spoken exclusively to the disciples, and represent the Kingdom from the Divine standpoint. First, the external fact of the Kingdom in the four parables for the crowd. Secondly, the internal secret of the Kingdom in four

parables for the disciples.

Taking the first four we find running through them the same elements. In each one the Lord reveals the fact of antagonistic principles, with continued conflict, and an issue in which failure apparently predominates rather than success. In the first parable there is hindrance in the soil. In the second, there is opposition on the part of an enemy who by night sows counterfeit seed in the field. In the third, there is seen the counter-development of a worldly power affording shelter and protection to evil. In the last of the four there is revealed an alien principle which makes for disintegration and destruction.

Thus it is evident that these four parables do not give us the picture of an age in which there is to be a greater increase of goodness until final perfection is attained; but rather one characterized by conflict, and one in which it appears as though evil triumphed rather than good. In the parable of the sower the work of the King is revealed, that namely, of scattering seed to produce Kingdom results. The work of the enemy is manifested in his attempt to prevent Kingdom results by the injury of the seed through the soil on which it falls. In the parable of the two sowings the work of the King is manifest and also the spoiling work of the enemy who sows the same field with darnel. In the parable of the mustard seed which, contrary to all law, produces a great tree, we have a revelation of an unnatural growth, an abortion, something never intended, and therefore lacking the true elements of strength. In the leaven, as we have seen, we have the simplest symbol of corruption.

These were among the strange things which Jesus said to the crowds, and we can best test the accuracy of this interpretation of the parables by examining the history of the past nineteen centuries. We may then see how perfectly our Lord understood the age which He was initiating. It is most important to remember that these parables do not give us pictures of the Church, but of the Kingdom as realized in the world, showing how far that realization is attained in the present dispensation. The subject of the Church is quite another, and though it is of great importance as the means to an end and as the instrument of the Kingdom, yet our Lord is not for the moment dealing with it, or with its ultimate destination.

Leaving the multitudes by the sea, the King gathered His disciples about Him in the house, and proceeded to utter to them parables which were not for the crowd. In them He revealed one activity, that of the King Himself. Here a great and glorious success is achieved in each case, and yet there is discrimination. There is first the finding of treasure in a field, and the purchase of the field to possess it. By no stretch of imagination can that field be made the picture of what any human being can ever do. He Who purchased the field of the world is not a rebellious subject, but the King Himself; and the treasure hidden is that latent possibility for the development of which the whole field must be purchased. So also in the next parable, notwithstanding all our exposition, and singing

I've found the pearl of greatest price!

My heart doth sing for joy;

And sing I must, for Christ is mine!

Christ shall my song employ,

the pearl is not intended to represent Christ. It is perfectly true that to find Him is to find the chief treasure here, but that is not the teaching of this particular parable. When we find Him, He is God's free gift to us, but this merchant purchased the pearl, selling all that he had to do it. Finally, in the parable of the net no

workers are recognized in the casting of the net into the sea. It is the act of God Himself. At the end of the age, when it is gathered in, there will be discrimination, and the measure of success is evidently shown.

We have then, simply and rapidly in this study, looked merely at the broad outlines of teaching. In order to accept some of the views indicated it will perhaps be necessary to come to the more detailed teaching concerning these parables, which is to follow. The chief interest at this moment is the contrast between the parables spoken to the multitudes and those to the disciples. To the crowds He declared the facts concerning the Kingdom in this age, which would eventually become patent to outward observation. When He gathered His disciples about Him alone, He showed them the inside truth. While there may appear to be in the passing centuries failure, shortcoming, the leavening of everything that should be pure, yet through all such failure God is Himself gathering out His treasure and finding His pearl. Not that He will neglect the field when the hidden treasure is realized, not that He will count as worthless all beside the pearl, for He has purchased the whole field and recognizes the preciousness of every gem; and there are other dispensations stretching out beyond this, in which the field itself will be realized, and He will cast out of His Kingdom everything that offends.

Finally we come to the last parable. It is interesting to remember that almost invariably we speak of the seven parables of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. As a matter of fact there are eight. Seven of them reveal truth concerning the Kingdom. The eighth, which is as full of beauty and of importance as any, deals with the responsibility of those who know the truth. Having uttered the seven parables, He asked His disciples, "Have ye understood all these things?" One is almost surprised to read their answer. "They say unto Him, Yea." I do not suppose for a moment that they did understand all, but they saw some little way, had some gleam of light, had in all probability caught the general teaching of the discourse in both its private and more public aspects. The King knew that presently they would understand, that with the coming of the Spirit there would come perfect illumination; and with infinite patience He accepted their confession, and proceeded to lay upon them a charge of responsibility.

This general survey of the scheme of the King's teaching makes evident certain matters of present and pressing importance. We must have the Master's conception of our age if we are to do the best work in it for His glory. If our eyes are set upon some consummation which He did not expect, then what can we expect other than that we shall be heart-sick ere long? If, on the other hand, we accept His view and consecrate ourselves to its realization, then we shall be able to bear "the burden and heat of the day," and do the work He has appointed. It is, I hold, of supreme value that we should understand that the age in which we serve is not the final one. These pictures reveal to us our responsibility for our day's work and no more. Beyond the end of the age to which these parables apply, are other ages in which God will make use of new methods for the carrying out of His ultimate purpose. There is to be as distinct a difference between the method beyond the second advent of our Lord and that of this age, as there is between the method of this age and that preceding the first advent. Let us never make the mistake of circumscribing Him, or of imagining that things will develop in any way other than according to His declaration. To put the matter definitely in one simple illustration. I do not think that the nerve of Christian Missionary endeavour was ever so successfully paralysed as when somewhere in the past men began to teach that the work of the Church was that of converting the world. The Bible never says so. Christ never says so. We have lived and wrought all too long as though there lay upon us the responsibility of bringing all the world by the preaching of the Gospel into subjection to Jesus Christ. We have no such commission, and He never charged us to the task. I do not wonder at the hopelessness of some pamphlets which were issued through the Press a few years ago on the failure of Christian Missions. But the men who thus wrote had

mistaken entirely the teaching of Jesus concerning the responsibility of the Church. There is not a single parable in this great discourse, excepting perhaps the parable of the leaven, which can by any means be construed into meaning that the world is to be converted by a gradual process; and if that parable is so interpreted it can only be by making the leaven here typify what it never typifies in any other part of the Bible; and moreover, by making this parable contradict the teaching of all the rest.

Having said so much regarding the Church's negative responsibility, I must add a word on the positive side. What is the definite work, the appointed charge of the Church in the world? It is that of evangelizing the world, not of converting it; it is that of proclaiming the Gospel message to all the nations, of pressing on and ever on until the last tribe has heard the good news in its own tongue, until the glorious evangel has sped throughout the whole earth. We are not responsible for converting London; we are responsible that all London shall hear the Gospel. We are not responsible for converting India, China, Africa, Madagascar, the islands of the sea; we are responsible that they shall hear the Gospel message. When we have fulfilled our responsibility, according to the teaching of Jesus there will come the consummation of the age, and the inauguration of a new order. A sifting process will follow when evil things will be burned up out of the Kingdom, and when He Who has purchased the field will pass through His territory, not for the casting of wicked men into hell, but that He may destroy all defiling things and banish oppression and tyranny. Beyond this age of infinite grace in which He calls out His Church, and equips her, and by her influence prepares for another dispensation, is the age of the strong hand, and the iron rod, and the righteous rule. There is nothing terrific in that save to evil-doers. Nay, verily, but we are rather sighing amid the waiting years, "Come quickly." We long for the rod of iron, for the balances of infinite justice; for by these will the world, sinning, sighing, and sorrowing, have its true chance of righteousness and justice.

Yet when our hearts cry out for His coming, we need to remember that it is for us to hasten it by hearing His injunctions, and realizing that in this present age our work is to press on until the last land shall have had the light, and the last soul heard the message. Beyond that He will begin a new work. Let us then, as the years pass away, be ever true to our deposit and our responsibility, knowing that God will be true to His; then shall our hearts be kept patient and steadfast, as we seek in obedience to His mandates to bring in the golden age of the Kingdom of Heaven among men.

#### The Parable of the Seed

"Behold, the sower went forth to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the birds came and devoured them: and others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth: and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell upon the thorns; and the thorns grew up, and choked them: and others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He that hath ears, let him hear." - Matthew 13:3-9.

"Hear then ye the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one, and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart. This is he that was sown by the way side. And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth. And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit, and bringeth forth,

some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." - Matthew 13:18-23.

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