

John Wesley's Explanatory Notes - Matthew 13

by John Wesley

John Wesley's sermon explores the parables of Jesus in Matthew 13, emphasizing the importance of receptiveness to God's word and the challenges to spiritual growth.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:9, Matthew 13:3-9, Matthew 13:11-12, Matthew 13:19, Matthew 13:22, Matthew 13:44-46, Matthew 13:52, Mark 4:25, Luke 8:18, John 12:40

Topics: "Parables", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Wesley explains Matthew 13, emphasizing the significance of parables in conveying spiritual truths. He highlights the various responses to the Gospel, illustrating how the condition of one's heart affects their ability to receive and bear fruit from God's word. Wesley points out that while some hear the message with joy, they may lack depth and ultimately fall away, while others allow worldly concerns to choke their spiritual growth. He concludes that the kingdom of heaven is a treasure that requires earnest seeking and understanding, and warns against the dangers of unbelief that can hinder God's work in our lives.

Transcript

XIII. 1. Mark 4:1; Luke 8:4.

Verse 2. He went into the vessel - Which constantly waited upon him, while he was on the sea coast.

Verse 3. In parables - The word is here taken in its proper sense, for apt similes or comparisons. This way of speaking, extremely common in the eastern countries, drew and fixed the attention of many, and occasioned the truths delivered to sink the deeper into humble and serious hearers. At the same time, by an awful mixture of justice and mercy, it hid them from the proud and careless. In this chapter our Lord delivers seven parables; directing the four former (as being of general concern) to all the people; the three latter to his disciples. Behold the sower - How exquisitely proper is this parable to be an introduction to all the rest! In this our Lord answers a very obvious and a very important question. The same sower, Christ, and the same preachers sent by him, always sow the same seed: why has it not always the same effect? He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!

Verse 4. And while he sowed, some seeds fell by the highway side, and the birds came and devoured them - It is observable, that our Lord points out the grand hinderances of our bearing fruit, in the same order as they occur. The first danger is, that the birds will devour the seed. If it escape this, there is then another danger, namely, lest it be scorched, and wither away. It is long after this that the thorns spring up

and choke the good seed. A vast majority of those who hear the word of God, receive the seed as by the highway side. Of those who do not lose it by the birds, yet many receive it as on stony places. Many of them who receive it in a better soil, yet suffer the thorns to grow up, and choke it: so that few even of these endure to the end, and bear fruit unto perfection: yet in all these cases, it is not the will of God that hinders, but their own voluntary perverseness.

Verse 8. Good ground - Soft, not like that by the highway side; deep, not like the stony ground; purged, not full of thorns.

Verse 11. To you, who have, it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven - The deep things which flesh and blood cannot reveal, pertaining to the inward, present kingdom of heaven. But to them who have not, it is not given - Therefore speak I in parables, that ye may understand, while they do not understand.

Verse 12. Whosoever hath - That is, improves what he hath, uses the grace given according to the design of the giver; to him shall be given -More and more, in proportion to that improvement. But whosoever hath not - Improves it not, from him shall be taken even what he hath - Here is the grand rule of God's dealing with the children of men: a rule fixed as the pillars of heaven. This is the key to all his providential dispensations; as will appear to men and angels in that day. Matthew 25:29; Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18; .

Verse 13. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing, they see not|-In pursuance of this general rule, I do not give more knowledge to this people, because they use not that which they have already: having all the means of seeing, hearing, and understanding, they use none of them: they do not effectually see, or hear, or understand any thing.

Verse 14. Hearing ye will hear, but in nowise understand - That is, Ye will surely hear. All possible means will be given you: yet they will profit you nothing; because your heart is sensual, stupid, and insensible; your spiritual senses are shut up; yea, you have closed your eyes against the light; as being unwilling to understand the things of God, and afraid, not desirous that he should heal you. Isaiah 6:9; John 12:40; Acts 28:26.

Verse 16. But blessed are your eyes - For you both see and understand. You know how to prize the light which is given you. Luke 10:23.

Verse 19. When any one heareth the word, and considereth it not - The first and most general cause of unfruitfulness. The wicked one cometh - Either inwardly; filling the mind with thoughts of other things; or by his agent. Such are all they that introduce other subjects, when men should be considering what they have heard.

Verse 20. The seed sown on stony places, therefore sprang up soon, because it did not sink deep, Matthew 13:5. He receiveth it with joy - Perhaps with transport, with ecstasy: struck with the beauty of truth, and drawn by the preventing grace of God.

Verse 21. Yet hath he not root in himself - No deep work of grace: no change in the ground of his heart. Nay, he has no deep conviction; and without this, good desires soon wither away. He is offended - He finds a thousand plausible pretences for leaving so narrow and rugged a way.

Verse 22. He that received the seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word and considereth it - In spite of Satan and his agents: yea, hath root in himself is deeply convinced, and in a great measure

inwardly changed; so that he will not draw back, even when tribulation or persecution ariseth. And yet even in him, together with the good seed, the thorns spring up, Matthew 13:7. (perhaps unperceived at first) till they gradually choke it, destroy all its life and power, and it becometh unfruitful. Cares are thorns to the poor: wealth to the rich; the desire of other things to all. The deceitfulness of riches - Deceitful indeed! for they smile, and betray: kiss, and smite into hell. They put out the eyes, harden the heart, steal away all the life of God; fill the soul with pride, anger, love of the world; make men enemies to the whole cross of Christ! And all the while are eagerly desired, and vehemently pursued, even by those who believe there is a God!

Verse 23. Some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty - That is, in various proportions; some abundantly more than others.

Verse 24. He proposed another parable - in which he farther explains the case of unfruitful hearers. The kingdom of heaven (as has been observed before) sometimes signifies eternal glory: sometimes the way to it, inward religion; sometimes, as here, the Gospel dispensation: the phrase is likewise used for a person or thing relating to any one of those: so in this place it means, Christ preaching the Gospel, who is like a man sowing good seed - The expression, is like, both here and in several other places, only means, that the thing spoken of may be illustrated by the following similitude. Who sowed good seed in his field - God sowed nothing but good in his whole creation. Christ sowed only the good seed of truth in his Church.

Verse 25. But while men slept - They ought to have watched: the Lord of the field sleepeth not. His enemy came and sowed darnel - This is very like wheat, and commonly grows among wheat rather than among other grain: but tares or vetches are of the pulse kind, and bear no resemblance to wheat.

Verse 26. When the blade was sprung up, then appeared the darnel - It was not discerned before: it seldom appears, as soon as the good seed is sown: all at first appears to be peace, and love, and joy.

Verse 27. Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it darnel? - Not from the parent of good. Even the heathen could say, "No evil can from thee proceed: 'Tis only suffer'd, not decreed: As darkness is not from the sun, Nor mount the shades, till he is gone."

Verse 28. He said, An enemy hath done this - A plain answer to the great question concerning the origin of evil. God made men (as he did angels) intelligent creatures, and consequently free either to choose good or evil: but he implanted no evil in the human soul: An enemy (with man's concurrence) hath done this. Darnel, in the Church, is properly outside Christians, such as have the form of godliness, without the power. Open sinners, such as have neither the form nor the power, are not so properly darnel, as thistles and brambles: these ought to be rooted up without delay, and not suffered in the Christian community. Whereas should fallible men attempt to gather up the darnel, they would often root up the wheat with them.

Verse 31. He proposed to them another parable - The former parables relate chiefly to unfruitful hearers; these that follow, to those who bear good fruit. The kingdom of heaven - Both the Gospel dispensation, and the inward kingdom. Mark 4:30; Luke 13:18.

Verse 32. The least - That is, one of the least: a way of speaking extremely common among the Jews. It becometh a tree - In those countries it grows exceeding large and high. So will the Christian doctrine spread in the world, and the life of Christ in the soul.

Verse 33. Three measures - This was the quantity which they usually baked at once: till the whole was leavened - Thus will the Gospel leaven the world and grace the Christian. Luke 13:20.

Verse 34. Without a parable spake he not unto them - That is, not at that time; at other times he did.

Verse 35. Psalms 78:2.

Verse 38. The good seed are the children of the kingdom - That is, the children of God, the righteous.

Verse 41. They shall gather all things that offend - Whatever had hindered or grieved the children of God; whatever things or persons had hindered the good seed which Christ had sown from taking root or bearing fruit. The Greek word is, All scandals.

Verse 44. The three following parables are proposed, not to the multitude, but peculiarly to the apostles: the two former of them relate to those who receive the Gospel; the third, both to those who receive, and those who preach it. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hid in a field - The kingdom of God within us is a treasure indeed, but a treasure hid from the world, and from the most wise and prudent in it. He that finds this treasure, (perhaps when he thought it far from him,) hides it deep in his heart, and gives up all other happiness for it.

Verse 45. The kingdom of heaven - That is, one who earnestly seeks for it: in verse Matthew 13:47 it means, the Gospel preached, which is like a net gathering of every kind: just so the Gospel, wherever it is preached, gathers at first both good and bad, who are for a season full of approbation and warm with good desires. But Christian discipline, and strong, close exhortation, begin that separation in this world, which shall be accomplished by the angels of God in the world to come.

Verse 52. Every scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven - That is, every duly prepared preacher of the Gospel has a treasure of Divine knowledge, out of which he is able to bring forth all sorts of instructions. The word treasure signifies any collection of things whatsoever, and the places where such collections are kept.

Verse 53. He departed thence - He crossed the lake from Capernaum: and came once more into his own country - Nazareth: but with no better success than he had had there before.

Verse 54. Whence hath HE - Many texts are not understood, for want of knowing the proper emphasis; and others are utterly misunderstood, by placing the emphasis wrong. To prevent this in some measure, the emphatical words are here printed in capital letters. Mark 6:1; Luke 4:16,22.

Verse 55. The carpenter's son - The Greek, word means, one that works either in wood, iron, or stone. His brethren - Our kinsmen. They were the sons of Mary, sister to the virgin, and wife of Cleophas or Alpheus. James - Styled by St. Paul also, the Lord's brother, Galatians 1:19. Simon - Surnamed the Canaanite.

Verse 57. They were offended at him - They looked on him as a mean, ignoble man, not worthy to be regarded. John 4:44; Luke 7:23.

Verse 58. He wrought not many mighty works, because of their unbelief - And the reason why many mighty works are not wrought now, is not, that the faith is not every where planted; but, that unbelief every where prevails.

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