

October 29

Mark 4

Matthew 13

There are three good reasons for Jesus' use of parables. First, the parables form an ideal vehicle for his continued ministry. Second, Jesus valued parables because they were an instrument of revelation but only for those to whom it is given to see. The third reason Jesus taught in parables was because it was a spur toward decision. The kingdom cannot be understood from outside...when a person understood who Jesus was...to hear the parable gave you no insight without that "click" which enables you to cry "I see". That is given to those who are ready to receive it.

The Parable of the Sower is a little different from most of the other parables, in that there is more than one main point. There are several details in the story Jesus tells which represent other real life people or groups. In most parables there is only one significant detail, or perhaps two, that are meant to stand for something else.

The Parable of the Sower reminds us that the really critical factor is the quality of the soil into which the seed is planted. Jesus taught His disciples to concentrate on the people that seemed most responsive, and to move on and shake the dust off their feet when they were rejected so that is what we must do as well.

Two times in Mark 4 we find reference to the fact that Jesus spoke in parables partly to differentiate between two classes of hearers: the disciples, who by inquiring would be taught on a deeper level the truths of the kingdom of heaven, and the crowds, to whom the parables were designed to deliver as much truth as they could accept and understand. God's method seems to be, throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament, to give us a certain amount of truth to see what we will do with it. If we respond, He always gives us more, but we are responsible to use the truth He has given us. If we will not respond, then He hides the rest of the truth from us.

In it, there are a number of details which have real significance to the listener, but even in this parable there is really only one main point being made: be careful how you receive the word of God. So, what kind of soil are you? Is God's word taking root in you? Is it being choked by busyness? Or are you multiplying by taking God's word seriously?

In the parable of the weeds among the wheat, it focuses on a question that must have been as troubling and significant in Matthew's day as it is in our own: "Why is there so much evil in the church?" Our church – every church is a "mixed bag"

of pure and impure, committed and uncommitted. As a church body we should be striving for a greater level of holiness and commitment. The very moment that we stop striving for greater purity we stand in jeopardy of losing what we have. Having said that, it is both unbiblical and unrealistic to expect or demand that any church is going to be a pure and unmixed group of believers. That will never happen. If we do not take heed to what Jesus is saying, there will be two very negative effects that will happen. First, we will be surprised and perhaps even bitter about the fact that fellow Christians do not always live up to our expectations. The second negative effect which will follow is that we will start demanding only perfect people be allowed to join us. When that happens, the basic nature of the church is violated and people are shut out from the grace of God.

The three parables which Chapter 13 ends are also unique to Matthew's gospel. They are much briefer than the Parable of the Sower or the Parable of the Weeds, but they are just as vivid and important. The hidden treasure and pearl make exactly the same point. It will cost you everything you have to gain the treasure, but it is worth all of that and more. There is a subtle difference between the two stories. In the first parable, the man plowing the field was not looking for any treasure. He was simply going about his daily routine when he literally stumbled over it. In the second story though, the pearl is found after a long and careful search. Some people trip over the great gospel message even though they were not looking for it. Other people search diligently through the dust bins of every other manmade religion looking for the truth.

If the weeds and wheat story teaches us not to judge others, the parable of the net reminds us that at the end of the age, there will be a judgment – a separation and God is the one who will do it.

It is amazing how much power is packed in these parables. Each forces us to ask a difficult soul question. And parables are so easy to memorize that they stick with us. So let me just close today by asking you some soul questions to reflect upon.

- 1) What kind of soil are you?
- 2) In the church, are you trying to separate weeds and wheat?
- 3) Are you pursuing the pearl of great price in a way that reflects its value?
- 4) How are you doing at sowing seeds? At helping growth? At inviting people into the life of Jesus knowing that a separation of Judgment is coming?

There is not much that will last for eternity. The parables remind us of this and challenge us to act accordingly.