

Thy Kingdom



Come

A STUDY OF THE
PARABLES IN
MATTHEW 13

*"To you it has been granted to know the
mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11).*

Gil Rugh

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Thy Kingdom Come

“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11).

Testing Tradition

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).

What does the Bible say about the kingdom of God? Is it a future physical kingdom on the earth ruled over by the Messiah? Or is it a spiritual kingdom that presently exists in the hearts of men and women who are believers in Jesus Christ? Many believers stand by the traditional view that interprets the parables of Matthew 13, the events of Matthew 24 and 25, and the references to the kingdom in the epistles as pertaining to present-day Christendom. They see a change in the emphasis and meaning from an Old Testament kingdom for the Jews to a kingdom made up of the Church.

From the very beginning, Christ’s public ministry revolved around the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom promised to Israel. “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 4:17). The miracles which Christ performed were done to demonstrate that He was the Messiah of the Old Testament—the One the Jews were looking for to be their King. The Church was not involved. Christ did not mention the Church until Matthew 16. Even then the disciples did not grasp the significance of what Christ told them.

The Sermon on the Mount was given to the Jews in anticipation of a coming earthly kingdom (see Matt. 5). Christ described the

character and conduct of those who will be part of the kingdom. The lessons are very applicable to believers today because all who come to believe in Jesus Christ at any point in time will be part of the kingdom. However, His message was addressed to Israel.

Rather than fall in with the traditional view, what if we were to conclude that Christ was talking about the future earthly kingdom? What if we interpreted these passages as relating primarily to events leading up to the establishment of the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament and anticipated by the Jews? It is very important that we have a proper understanding of the context of Christ's teaching about the kingdom before we attempt to interpret the parables of the kingdom recorded in Matthew 13. The goal of this study of the kingdom is to carefully compare Scripture with Scripture, both Old and New Testaments.

It is important to study this future kingdom because it affects the way we live now. By repeatedly emphasizing the kingdom throughout His Word, God constantly reminds us that as heirs of the kingdom our conduct is to reflect the character of the King.

From Genesis to Matthew

For he was looking for the city which has foundations,
whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10).

The background for Matthew's expression "the kingdom of heaven" and Mark and Luke's "kingdom of God" is found in the Old Testament. The expressions "the kingdom of heaven" or "the kingdom of the heavens" were first implied in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15). This was God's promise to Abraham and his descendants, the Jews, of a literal, earthly kingdom. This promise was reiterated in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7) and was emphasized throughout the books of the prophets. "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). It was this kingdom that the Jews were anticipating when John the Baptist came on the scene (Matt. 3, see also Mark 1, Luke 3, John 1). It was a kingdom that was to encompass other nations but whose center would be the nation Israel.

When John the Baptist and Jesus preached the message of the kingdom, the Jews naturally assumed that they were talking about the kingdom prophesied by Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets.

Keep in mind that the kingdom message Jesus preached was restricted to the Jews.

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5,6).

The disciples were not to take the message to the Gentiles or the Samaritans (half-Jew, half-Gentile). This is important. If it was just a spiritual kingdom, why was it restricted to the Jews?

There is another point we must consider. Even at the end of Christ’s ministry, after extensive exposure to His ministry, the disciples still assumed that Jesus had been talking about a literal, earthly kingdom. Jesus had told them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 13:11). They were the ones chosen to know and understand the things concerning the kingdom. If they were wrong in assuming that Christ was teaching about the promised, literal, earthly kingdom, Jesus did nothing to correct their misunderstanding.

The Jewish Mindset

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders . . . there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore (Is. 9:6,7).

The Jews of Jesus’ day anticipated a glorious kingdom with a Jewish king who would rule the nations of the earth from Jerusalem. They were familiar with the Old Testament prophecy that said the following about the kingdom:

Now it will come about that in the last days, the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in

His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem, and He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war (Is. 2:2-4; see also Is. 9:6,7; Is. 60,61).

The Jews never wavered in their belief of a future, earthly kingdom. And in the years of His ministry, Jesus never gave any hint that He was talking about anything different from what His hearers understood. If the kingdom recorded in the Book of Matthew is—as some scholars insist—a spiritual kingdom that merely exists in the hearts of people, then no one in Jesus’ day had the foggiest idea what He was talking about, not even the disciples. In fact, when John the Baptist sent a messenger to ask Him if He was truly the Messiah, the One who would set up the earthly kingdom for the Jews, Jesus did not say, “John, you do not understand about the kingdom.” Rather, He said in effect, “Look, I am offering you the proofs and evidences that the Old Testament promised in the context of an earthly kingdom.”

For Jesus to announce that the kingdom of God is at hand (as a spiritual kingdom) and then limit it to the Jews would have been anti-biblical. In light of the rest of Scripture, this is not true. God has always ruled in the hearts of believers, and that includes both Gentile and Jewish believers. Ruth, for example, had the Law of God in her heart. His Law is in the hearts of all the righteous and always has been. “The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip” (Ps. 37:30,31).

The expression “the kingdom of heaven” and “the kingdom of the heavens” is unique to Matthew. He uses it thirty-two times. “The kingdom of God” is also used in the other three Gospels. Matthew may have used “kingdom of the heavens” because his Gospel is a Jewish Gospel and the Jews had an aversion to using the name of God.

Some theologians make a distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, saying that the kingdom of heaven includes those who are *professing* to be believers while the kingdom

of God is limited to just those who are believers. However, Jesus told Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the *kingdom of God*” (John 3:3, emphasis added), and in His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the *kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 5:20, emphasis added). Notice that the requirements to get into the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same.

Jesus said that entrance into the kingdom of heaven is limited to those who do the will of God: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matt. 7:21). What is the will of God? His will is for each of us to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, as the Savior for our sins.

Jesus referred to the kingdom of heaven again: “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). Conversion, or the new birth, is necessary to get into the kingdom of heaven just as it is for the kingdom of God.

Daniel wrote about the kingdoms of the earth in his prophecy:

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever (Dan. 2:44).

God is going to set up a kingdom. The “kingdom of the heavens” will be the rule of heaven that will come to earth. It will be given to the Son of Man in the heavens, and then Christ will take up His rule on the earth (see also Matt. 18:3, Mark 1:15).

Although holding one view or the other is not a test of faith, I believe that the two expressions “the kingdom of heaven” and “the kingdom of God” refer to the same thing. No distinction really stands the test of Scripture. Therefore, throughout this study, the two expressions will be used interchangeably.

Epistle Passages

Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in

faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (James 2:5).

To help our understanding we must also study the expressions “kingdom of heaven,” “kingdom” and “kingdom of God” as used in the epistles. “Kingdom of heaven” is not used outside the Gospel of Matthew, but “kingdom” or “kingdom of God” is used approximately 18 times in the epistles. Each time it refers to God’s divine rule. We can interpret these passages consistently with what we find in the Old Testament and in the Gospels.

The concept of a kingdom already in existence, comprised of all the believers presently on earth, would have been foreign to all the writers of the epistles. They wrote with anticipation of a future kingdom. To make the kingdom epistle passages refer to hearts—as some do—calls for an arbitrary change in meaning. This would leave one to wonder when the kingdom ceased to be the kingdom of the Old Testament and became a kingdom in people’s hearts.

Paul’s Position

In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:1). Paul joined two ideas together in time—Christ’s appearing and His kingdom, looking ahead to that time when Christ Himself will return to establish His kingdom on the earth. If we spiritualize the kingdom, that would mean Christ’s kingdom would precede Christ.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the *kingdom of God*; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50, emphasis added). It is at the Rapture that the Church will undergo this transformation from perishable to imperishable. Clearly then, the Church cannot enter the kingdom in its physical state but will undergo a transformation before the kingdom is established. “Behold I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed” (v. 51). Paul encouraged Timothy, “If we endure, we will also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 2:12). Endurance in suffering and trials prepare us for the time when we shall reign with Him—a future time.

Paul refuted the idea that the kingdom is only a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of those who believe. The Corinthians had problems

with arrogance. They were looking down their noses at the Apostle Paul whom God had used to bring them to salvation. So Paul said to them:

You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed *I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you* (1 Cor. 4:8, emphasis added).

The Corinthians acted as though they were already ruling in the kingdom. Paul said he wished it were so, because if they were reigning, he would be reigning also, and that would end all his sufferings, hardships and heartaches. This passage proves that believers are not ruling and reigning in a spiritual kingdom with Christ.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep . . . But each in his own order: Christ the first fruit, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power (1 Cor. 15:20-24).

Paul thought in the context of the Old Testament kingdom. He had in mind a future kingdom and a specific sequence of events: first, the resurrection of Christ and all believers, next, the Millennium—the first stage of the eternal kingdom. The thousand year reign of Christ, the Messiah, will be climaxed by the resurrection of the wicked and sentence to destruction so all sin will be abolished. After that, the kingdom will be ready to be submitted to God the Father by God the Son—the final steps of the eternal kingdom. Paul wrote to the Romans concerning the kingdom.

Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:16,17).

As we now live, food and drink are issues because we need them. In the coming kingdom, food and drink will be of no consequence; they will be non-issues. Glorified bodies do not need food and drink to sustain them.

Peter's Position

Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you (2 Pet. 1:10,11).

Peter, Jewish as he was, anticipated a future kingdom which would never end and over which the Messiah would rule forever.

James' Position

James is one of the earliest books of the New Testament and is very Jewish in its orientation. What would the Jews identify when James talked about “the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5). The Gospels had not yet been written, so the Jews’ only source of information would have been the Old Testament Scripture. James, too, referred to the heirs of the kingdom, not present possessors.

Positionally But Not Practically

So that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12).

Some passages in the New Testament refer to believers’ positional part in the kingdom.

Paul wrote, “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). In his letter to the Ephesians Paul wrote in the same regard: “And seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). “Aha,” you say, “we *are* in the kingdom! The kingdom exists in our hearts.” But wait a minute. We must be consistent with what we already know about the kingdom, that it is yet future.

We have been taken from the domain of Satan and have been placed in the kingdom of Christ. That is true, positionally, but it is not yet realized in practice. We await the Rapture of the Church when we will receive our glorified bodies and will be presented to the Father as holy and blameless, without sin. We have been transferred to the kingdom of His Son—positionally—so that when the

kingdom is established, every believer in Jesus Christ is assured—in practice—a place in it.

There are more passages that refer to our being placed positionally in the kingdom (cf. Col. 4:11, 1 Thess. 2:12, 1 Pet. 5:10, 2 Thess. 1:5), but the point remains unchanged. The kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament is the same kingdom recorded, offered and developed in the Gospels and epistles of the New Testament.

The people of God are moving toward the kingdom over which the Messiah will rule and reign. That is the focal point of all history. Although God is not currently dealing directly with the nation Israel, the central nation of the kingdom, He is presently preparing a people (the Church, the Bride of Christ) who will share in the kingdom and will be a vital part of it.

Throughout the New Testament, this kingdom is brought to our attention. It is a reminder of where we are going and how we are to be living our lives. As believers, our conduct is governed by the fact that we are heirs of the kingdom. Someday, in glorified bodies, we will share in that kingdom and in the eternal glory of God.

Consistent Interpretation

He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

To have a proper grasp of the kingdom it is important that we reason from the framework of the Old Testament. Transitioning from the kingdom God promised in the Old Testament to a spiritual kingdom in the New Testament produces nothing but confusion. We cannot do away with any of God’s promises, nor can we make His promises spiritual. For example, what would happen if we spiritualized the promise of heaven? Some would claim that it is not a real heaven but just a spiritual truth and a feeling in the heart. If we are not careful with the way we interpret God’s Word, we will begin to believe the Word is not consistent. At that point, things will come apart; we will have no basis on which to interpret anything.

The important thing is to understand the context in which Matthew 13 was written. A consistent interpretation of the kingdom is

essential to a proper understanding of the parables—their focal point being the preparation of Israel for the kingdom. The parables also enabled His disciples to gain insight into the fact that the kingdom would not be established at that point in time.

Immediately preceding the ascension of Christ, the disciples asked, “Lord is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus did not say, “Look, guys, there is no kingdom.” Instead He said, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (v. 7). He told them their understanding of the kingdom was fine, but they did not need to know when it would be established.

The fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies was offered with the first coming of Jesus Christ. When the Jews rejected Him, they did not understand that they were rejecting the very Messiah whose kingdom they were seeking. The Jews, prophets and disciples did not understand that the suffering of the Messiah and the glory of the kingdom would be separated by at least two thousand years.

Parables of the Kingdom

And He spoke many things to them in parables (Matt. 13:3).

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. They take events from everyday life and use them to illustrate future or present spiritual truths.

Revealing the Kingdom Through Parables

Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah was clearly demonstrated by the events that took place (Matt. 12). Jesus had confronted the nation Israel about the unpardonable sin. He talked to them about the sign of Jonah—His own coming death and resurrection. Jesus emphasized that spiritual relationships are more important than physical relationships. However, because the Jews refused to believe Him, that same day Jesus began to speak to them of the kingdom only in parables.

Focus of the Parables

The focus of the parables was on preparing Israel for the kingdom. Even though the time frame includes the Church Age (the

period of time in which we now live), the focus of Matthew 13 was not on the Church but rather on God's program for the Jews as a people and as a nation.

Purpose of the Parables

For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand (Matt. 13:12,13).

Christ had two purposes for the parables in Matthew 13. The first purpose was to give His disciples knowledge and additional truth regarding the kingdom. The second purpose was to keep unbelievers from understanding these same truths (Matt. 13:12,13).

Believers are privileged to have knowledge of Christ and understanding concerning the kingdom. For the unbeliever, however, even what understanding he has will be taken away. He will hear truth presented but he will not grasp it and hear stories he can relate to, but he will not understand the spiritual truth being conveyed.

Christ said it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for the cities of His day. The people of His day had greater light and they rejected it (Matt. 11). Since greater light brings greater responsibility, it is an act of grace that God stopped giving them added revelation, which would only increase their guilt and condemnation before Him. Israel wanted salvation, but they wanted it their way—based upon works and religious activity. They were not willing to hear what God had to say on the subject and to submit to Him. They wanted forgiveness, but they did not want it God's way. They had closed their eyes and ears. As a result, Christ began to speak to them in parables.

Although Christ had taught in parables before, the disciples now sensed a difference, so they asked:

“Why do you speak to them in parables?” Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted” (Matt. 13:10,11).

Mysteries of the Kingdom

A mystery as used in the New Testament is not something secret or difficult to understand, as we think of mysteries today. Rather, it is something revealed in the New Testament that was not revealed in the Old Testament. It is a new revelation—something we would not know anything about if God did not tell us (1 Cor. 15:51).

The Old Testament prophets saw the sufferings and the glorious reign of the Messiah together in time, and they could not understand how He could be both a suffering Messiah and a Messiah who ruled and reigned in glory; a rejected Messiah and a glorious, worshiped Messiah. Jesus' disciples were looking for the kingdom to be set up momentarily. But in these parables, Christ unfolded a mystery. He revealed that because of Israel's rejection, there would be a gap in time between the Messiah's first coming to offer the kingdom and His second coming to establish the kingdom. How large of a gap, Jesus did not say.

Guidelines for Interpretation of the Parables

1. We must be aware of the historical setting and be careful not to read our present-day customs into the interpretation. When we talk about a sower going out to sow seed, we must not think of the modern-day farmer. Rather, we must think of what a sower would have done in biblical times.
2. The context is crucial. You cannot understand a parable apart from its immediate context.
3. You must compare Scripture with Scripture. Our interpretation must be consistent with the whole of the Bible.
4. There is one central truth being taught in a parable. Do not try to find something significant in every little detail. A lot of the detail is given just to make the story flow. Therefore, when we study a parable, we must look for the one, central, spiritual truth being conveyed in that parable.

The Parable of the Sower

And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying "Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and

ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear” (Matt. 13:3–9).

The parable of the sower is not difficult to interpret because Christ interpreted it for us. It contains three important factors: the sower, the seed and the soil.

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matt. 13:18–23).

The Sower

“Behold, the sower went out to sow” (Matt. 13:3). In this passage Christ did not tell us anything about the sower, but in the parable of the wheat and the tares, He identified the sower as the Son of Man (v. 37). There is no reason to make a different identification here. However, we should include those who serve Christ by spreading the seed, because some of the seed sowing is done during the time of the coming Tribulation (Rev. 14:6). Those who go as Christ’s

representatives stand in His place.

The Seed

Luke identified the seed as the Word of God (Luke 8:11). Specifically, people hearing the Word of God, “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). It is the message concerning the kingdom that is in view in this parable.

And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crops permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come (Mark 4:26–29).

This parable shows that the seed has life. There is vitality and power in the seed which germinates and springs to life on its own. The Gospel—the good news about Christ, His death and resurrection—has power to bring about salvation. It is, in and of itself, alive and powerful. It is unique and remarkable. “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). It is mind boggling that you can take the Bible and share the words of it, and people hear and believe; and it brings about transformation of life. You can read any other book ever written, but it will not have power and life. Only the Bible is alive because it is the Word of God. Anyone who is saved is saved because he *heard the good news of Jesus Christ and believed it*. As will be seen by the four soils, whenever the seed or the Word of God goes forth it always brings a reaction by the hearers, whether it is negative or positive. There is no neutral ground concerning the message of the kingdom.

The Four Soils

The main point of this parable is the four different soils. They represent four different heart conditions. All the responsibility is put on the person who hears, on the condition of the heart of the hearer.

The Hard Heart

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road (Matt. 13:19).

When the Word falls on the hard, beaten path, it lays on the surface and does not penetrate the soil. The hearer's mind is occupied with other things. Satan comes and snatches away the seed, and the person does not give the message another thought. In fact, he loses what understanding he had (Matt. 13:12).

The sower was diligent. The seed was alive and powerful. However, the condition of this heart was not receptive, so the seed did not take root. That is Satan's objective: to snatch away the Word, to keep people from understanding and believing.

The Shallow Heart

Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away (Matt. 13:5,6).

This describes the man who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He experiences an emotional response, "yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away" (v. 21).

There is nothing wrong with an emotional response to salvation. If the seed had truly penetrated, durability would have characterized the person as he experienced opposition and persecution. In contrast, when opposed for his faith in Christ, the individual immediately threw it away. He was not a true believer at all.

The Cluttered Heart

And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word,

and it becomes unfruitful (Matt. 13:22).

After the seed is sown, the seed and the weeds grow up together. Eventually, the weeds strangle the good crop. The person is concerned about the security of the tangible things of this life. There is no room in his heart for the Word of God, for Jesus Christ.

The seed was sown, but it was strangled and rendered lifeless. It produced no fruit. That is the context in which Jesus said that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Mark 10:25). His life is already full.

The Fruitful Heart

And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matt. 13:23).

When seed falls on a heart that has been prepared by God, the seed is understood and received. It takes hold in the life and produces fruit, “some a hundredfold, some sixty, and thirty” (Matt. 13:8). Not all believers produce the same amount of fruit, but the good soil always produces fruit.

The fruitful heart will continually grow and increase in knowledge and understanding of God’s Word, plan and purposes, but it takes time for the seed to grow as it is nurtured and nourished. It takes the seed time to mature in the believer’s life.

Conclusion of the Sower Parable

Remember the focal point of the parables is on preparing God’s people, Israel, for the kingdom. However, there is an application for us as well. It is our responsibility as believers in Jesus Christ to be faithful sowers of the Word of God. How God chooses to use His Word is between God and the person who hears. The condition of the heart of the listener will determine his response.

The Parable of the Tares and the Wheat

Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The

kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matt. 13:24-30).

Similar Parables, Different Emphases

There are similarities between the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares. They both deal with sowing and a crop being produced. The emphasis of the parables, however, is different. In the parable of the sower, the emphasis is on the way people hear the Word. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the emphasis is on the counterfeit that is produced by Satan. The parable gives a comparison between the good crop and the bad crop.

As those who hold the view that the kingdom is the Church, they interpret this parable as saying that the Church is composed of both believers and unbelievers—wheat and tares. They say that since the wheat and tares are to grow up together, the unbeliever ought to be part and parcel of all that is in the Church; at the end of time, God will sort them out. That kind of thinking explains why some denominations have fallen into apostasy. They have tolerated unregenerate people who, in turn, have taken over the church, creating an entity that no longer represents a New Testament Church. The failure to properly interpret the Word of God leads to confusion in every area of practice and doctrine.

Interpretation

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables,

and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.” Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (Matt. 13:34-43).

By explaining this parable and the parable of the sower, Jesus gave us the foundation for how we are to interpret the rest of the parables. Remember, there is application to the Church, but they are not about the Church. The primary time frame of these parables is the seven-year Tribulation leading up to the establishing of the kingdom.

The Sower

Jesus identified the sower, “And He said, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man’” (Matt. 13:37). Jesus used the Messianic title—Son of Man—from Old Testament prophecy:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him (Dan. 7:13).

The Jews would have understood that title in the context of the Messiah and the promised kingdom.

The Field

Jesus identified the field, “And the field is the world” (Matt. 13:38). Up to this point, the seed—the message of the kingdom—had only been sown in Palestine, a limited geographical region. Jesus now told the disciples that the seed concerning the kingdom would be sown throughout the world, and that it would take time. The kingdom would not be established immediately as they expected and hoped.

Two Different Seeds, Two Different People

The field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one (Matt. 13:38).

In the parable of the sower, the seed was the message of the kingdom. However, in this parable the good seed represents those who have believed the message of the kingdom—the sons of the kingdom. By contrast, the tares are the unbelieving counterfeits sown by the devil.

Tares look very much like wheat. In fact, sometimes one cannot distinguish between the two. Jesus said, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). He gave a warning about people who will come in disguise, pretending to be prophets of God, but whose message is really from Satan.

At the judgment—the harvesting and the sorting out of the wheat and tares—many of these “wolves” will come before Christ and say, “‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matt. 7:22,23). They were counterfeit, not genuine.

From the beginning of time, clear back to the Garden of Eden, Satan has presented himself as something he is not, and has offered something he does not have. Paul showed concern about Satan’s influence on the minds of the Corinthians when he wrote:

But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity

and purity of devotion to Christ . . . For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness whose end will be according to their deeds (2 Cor. 11:3, 13-15).

Satan's prime ministry is to produce a false crop.

A description of the counterfeit religion Satan will offer during the Tribulation is recorded in Revelation 13. After the Rapture of the Church, Satan will give his authority to the Antichrist, and the entire world will follow and worship this false messiah. The counterfeit will be so effective that the world will think the Antichrist is accomplishing what Jesus Christ could not accomplish when He was on earth.

Then in the middle of the seven-year period, the Antichrist will turn against Israel and will attempt to annihilate the entire nation. The people will be persecuted, not because they believe in the Messiah, but because they are Jews. Many will claim a faith they do not have; no one will know who is true and who is false.

However, God will use the Tribulation to bring Israel to her knees, to prepare the nation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Only then will the Jews be willing to believe in Him as their Messiah and Savior.

The Reapers

And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (Matt 24:31).

God will send out His angels prior to the establishment of the earthly kingdom at the end of the Tribulation. The angels are the reapers in this parable. The wicked will be gathered for destruction; the righteous will be gathered for the kingdom.

Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left (Matt. 24:40,41).

The context of these verses is the time before the kingdom. These familiar verses have nothing to do with the Rapture. The angels will gather out the wicked, and those left will go into the kingdom that the Messiah will establish. There will be no mistake in the harvest because the angels themselves will gather the elect.

Unbelievers

Jesus Christ “will throw them [the wicked] into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:42). At the end of the Tribulation, all unbelievers will be gathered together and sentenced to destruction by Jesus Christ. Only believers will be left alive to enter the kingdom that He is going to establish and rule over.

Believers

“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear” (Matt. 13:43). What a contrast! Some are going to be consigned to eternal suffering forever and ever, and some will be brought into the glorious presence of God and the joy of His presence forever. All believers from the beginning of time, along with those believers from the Tribulation, will enter the earthly kingdom at the end of the Tribulation.

The Dragnet

The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:47-50).

The parable of the dragnet further elaborates on the separation of believers for the kingdom and unbelievers for judgment. When John the Baptist came he announced the Messiah as the One who would come in judgment:

His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).

Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are characterized by lawlessness and rebellion against God and they will be exposed for what they are and rooted out of the kingdom. Like the chaff and the wheat, the fish in the parable represent believers and unbelievers that will be separated prior to the establishment of the earthly kingdom.

The destiny of those who cannot enter the kingdom is very bleak. Matthew emphasized the anguish and suffering of the people who will be sentenced to a place of outer darkness. It is an awful picture of weeping and gnashing of teeth; as for the first time they realize that they are hopelessly lost for eternity (Matt. 8:12). At that point they will be cast into Hades, a place of torment, to await sentencing to Hell at the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ. There they will be forever consigned to eternal suffering and destruction.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." (Matt. 13:31,32).

The parable of the mustard seed and the parable of leaven are closely linked together. The mustard seed parable has to do with the visible external growth of the kingdom, while leaven has to do with how the message of the kingdom works to bring about its intended result. As we relate these parables to the kingdom that Christ will establish on earth, we see that the events will take place just before His Second Coming.

This parable has traditionally been interpreted to say that the mustard seed and the tree represent Christendom: since Christ has come, the message concerning Him has blossomed into what we call the professing Church. This view sees the birds in the tree as

representing evil influences in Christendom. Just as the birds in the earlier parable of the sower represented the devil, so here they are interpreted to represent wickedness and evil, signifying that the spiritual kingdom—Christendom—has been pervaded by wickedness.

I have no problem with the factuality of that interpretation. The message concerning Christ has blossomed today. Multitudes of people profess a relationship with God, and evil has pervaded professing Christendom. But I do not think that those are the truths being presented in the parable of the mustard seed. Rather, the truths presented are truths concerning the kingdom of heaven.

From a Tiny Seed

The mustard seed is used several times in the New Testament to illustrate smallness. It is a tiny seed, but it grows up to be a 12'–15' tree-like plant. In this parable, the mustard seed is the ministry of John the Baptist and the message of the kingdom as John presented it. Jesus said, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached" (Luke 16:16). Jesus said that the proclamation of the kingdom began with John. Although the kingdom was announced throughout the Old Testament, it was not offered to Israel until John the Baptist came on the scene and introduced the Messiah of Israel, Jesus Christ. From that small seed will come a kingdom that will encompass the world.

A sprig, the small tender shoot or branch, commonly referred to the Messiah. It portrayed His lowly, insignificant origin, humanly speaking. Numerous great Messianic passages (i.e., Is. 11:1, 53:2, Zech. 6:12) also use the picture of the branch or a shoot to denote smallness. Note the parallel between those references and the mustard seed in Matthew 13.

The prophet Ezekiel said that a sprig would come from the top of the cedar—the cedar representing the house of David. From that line, then, God said that He would take this sprig and plant it "on a high and lofty mountain . . . of Israel" (Ezek. 17:22,23). This is a reference to Jerusalem, built on Mount Zion and it will be the capital of the world in the kingdom. "All the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord" (v. 24).

Birds in the Tree

The picture of a tree with birds in the branches is painted in the Old Testament to portray blessing and prosperity. Nebuchadnezzar had a vision of a tree (Dan. 4:10-12) which was interpreted by Daniel (vv. 20-22). The mighty kingdom of Babylon, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, was pictured as a great tree with the birds of the air nesting in it. This tree sowed blessing and prosperity. It encompassed and made provision for many nations.

As recorded in Ezekiel 31, the nation Assyria was pictured as a great tree with birds living in the branches. To be consistent with Old Testament interpretation, the birds represent prosperity and blessing, not the evilness that pervades Christendom.

A World Kingdom

At the end of the Tribulation, Christ will come to destroy all other kingdoms and will establish a kingdom that will encompass the world (Dan. 2:44). From a small, insignificant beginning, Christ's kingdom will become a worldwide kingdom of great blessing, majesty and prosperity. However, a lapse in time will occur between the planting of the tiny seed (John the Baptist) and the establishment of the majestic tree of the millennial kingdom (Ezek. 17).

The Parable of the Leaven

He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened" (Matt. 13:33).

The parable of the leaven picked up on the same idea as the mustard seed, but viewed it from a different perspective. While the tree represented the visible kingdom that will encompass the world, the leaven pictures the message of the kingdom as it permeates the world in the process of preparing Israel for the coming kingdom.

We first read of leaven in Exodus 12. As Israel left Egypt, they were told to take no leaven with them. Leaven represented a tie with the past and they were told to break all ties and relationships with Egypt.

The Unstoppable Process

Because leaven is sometimes used in the Bible in the context of sin, some have said that the parable of the leaven represents the sin that will pervade the spiritual kingdom of God and corrupt it. Evil does pervade the world and even the professing church, but I do not think that is the point of this parable. First, I do not believe we are talking about a spiritual kingdom, but rather, about the earthly kingdom.

Second, the basic symbol involved in leaven or yeast is its permeating influence. In a quiet, unobservable way, it permeates everything. During the Tribulation, the message of the kingdom will permeate and spread until it has encompassed the entire world. The world is destined to be saturated with the message of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah clearly defined the gracious offer of God in providing salvation for humanity. It began with an invitation to come and receive His salvation at no charge (Is. 55:1,6).

God's Word always accomplishes His purposes. Every time He sends forth His Word, it will accomplish what He wants. It will not come back until its task has been completed. Once the leaven has been started, the process is irreversible and unstoppable.

Time Frame of the Leavening Process

The full realization of what the leaven accomplishes will come in the Tribulation. Although there is application today as we send out the Word of God, in this parable God was referring to the Tribulation—the time when Israel will be refined and prepared for accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

The Tribulation will be a time of Jewish persecution such as the world has never seen. Nonetheless, it is during this time that the Gospel of the kingdom will have its greatest impact, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). This verse refers to the Tribulation; it has nothing to do with the Rapture. The Tribulation is the seven-year period that will lead up to the Second Coming of Christ to earth to establish the Jewish kingdom of which all the other nations will partake.

God's Agent

Revelation 7 and 14 records 144,000 specially sealed Jews. We are not told much about them. Some believe they are the Jewish messengers God will use during the last three and one-half years of the Tribulation to saturate the world with the Gospel of the kingdom.

However, John clearly wrote that God will send an angel to proclaim the Gospel to those who live on the earth:

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters" (Rev. 14:6,7).

God is going to see to it that every single person, in every place in the world, is exposed to the Gospel of the kingdom. And then the end will come.

Today's World

Praise God for how He is working in the church today. Although the church may not reach the whole world for Christ in the time given, the world definitely will be reached in the Tribulation. Keep in mind that during the Tribulation, the Church is no longer on the earth; it is in heaven. It may be that this angel will use the 144,000 to carry out the proclamation to the world, we do not know. The point is that the whole world will be *leavened* with the Gospel. The result will be the national conversion of Israel.

God Keeps His Promise

We live in "the times of the Gentiles" when God is saving primarily non-Jewish people, but that does not mean that God has rejected His people, Israel. Throughout the ancient days as recorded in the Old Testament until the early church as recorded in Acts 2, God has dealt with Israel as a nation and as His people. That will be true again after the Rapture of the Church. Paul revealed this mystery:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own

estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins (Rom. 11:25-27).

Israel now stands as an enemy of the Gospel of Christ because they rejected Him as Messiah. As a result, God has chosen to graciously do a work with the Gentiles for a period of time. That does not mean that there are no Jews are being saved. It does mean that in our day and age those Jews who believe in Jesus Christ are the exception, not the rule. There is coming a time when God will once again pick up the program with the Jews and the situation will be reversed. At the end of the time of the Gentiles, God will bring to completion His program with Israel.

There will be a spiritual salvation and restoration of Israel that will also bring them physical deliverance from the Tribulation. The Messiah will intervene on Israel’s behalf and the Gospel of the kingdom will permeate the world. Jews from around the world will recognize the Messiah and turn to Him. Having come through this time of trial, they will recognize that Jesus whom they crucified is their Messiah, and they will bow down to worship Him saying, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 23:39).

Mustard Seed and Leaven Conclusion

The message of the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are very similar. From its small beginning, the kingdom will blossom to a great world-encompassing kingdom. When the supernatural, living and powerful Word of God goes out, it permeates lives. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God that brings about salvation to all who believe—whether Jew or Gentile, whether now or during the Tribulation.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field (Matt. 13:44).

There is probably more disagreement over the interpretation of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price than over any of the other parables. The parable of the hidden treasure is commonly interpreted as referring to Israel; it would be the treasure hidden in the field that is the world. Jesus Christ then came and gave everything He had, to purchase Israel for Himself.

The parable of the costly pearl is usually interpreted as referring to the Church. Jesus Christ, it is said, came and purchased the pearl for Himself. By His death He provided redemption for His Church. The meaning of the two parables is both Israel and the Church have been secured by Christ for Himself. Although I do not have a problem with the truthfulness of those statements, I seriously question whether that is the thrust of the two parables.

As we have already seen, the Church is not in view in Matthew 13. The subject of this chapter is the kingdom of heaven. There is direct application for the period of time that we live in, but the prime interpretation of these parables is not for our time.

In previous parables, Jesus described those who will become part of the kingdom, but in the pearl and the treasure parables Christ placed emphasis on what is involved for a person to secure the kingdom for himself.

The difference in emphasis of these two parables is that one will find the kingdom when he is not looking, and the other will find it after diligent searching.

Hidden Treasure

In biblical times it was common practice to bury precious things in the ground. If war came and a person had to leave, he could always come back and dig up his treasure. But sometimes people were deported and never returned, or they were killed. The treasure would then lay buried in the ground until someone accidentally discovered it.

Many people would walk over that ground without knowing the treasure was there. But when someone accidentally found it, he would sell everything he had to purchase the field, because the law said that whoever owned the field owned the treasure. The person's goal was to secure the treasure for himself, whatever the cost.

Within the context of what Christ had been emphasizing in

chapter 13, the hidden treasure referred to the kingdom that Christ had offered to Israel. Although it was of overwhelming value and importance, it was unrecognized by the majority of the people just like the buried treasure.

As Christ's ministry was drawing to a close, He wept over the city of Jerusalem, "Saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes'" (Luke 19:42). Jesus was their Messiah, the One who could bring them salvation, but it was a treasure hidden from their eyes of understanding. They were blind and did not know it.

Found by Those Not Seeking

This parable teaches that a great treasure is sometimes found by those who are not actively looking for it. The woman at the well in Samaria (John 4) was not looking for the King or for the kingdom. She just went to the well to draw water and Jesus confronted her there. The result: she believed and brought others from the city to Christ. The Apostle Paul was not searching for Christ on the road to Damascus; he was opposing Him (Acts 9). Yet Paul came upon the great treasure.

God put it this way, "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek me" (Is. 65:1). Some who are not looking for the kingdom will be permitted to find it—to stumble upon it, so to speak. The Gentiles were not, and are not, searching for the King or the kingdom, yet many have been privileged to come to believe in the Messiah. In contrast, the Jews were looking for the kingdom and they overlooked it.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matt. 13:45,46).

In contrast to the parable of the hidden treasure, the parable of the costly pearl portrays those who are seeking and searching for the Messiah and His salvation—the Jews. This costly pearl represents the kingdom and the King. The picture is of a person who is

seeking for the Messiah and for the kingdom.

God warned His people, Israel, that if they wandered and pursued other gods, they would be judged and scattered throughout the world. Because of unbelief, Israel has been scattered for centuries. Yet there is hope for Israel, “But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all you soul” (Deut. 4:29).

God will use the events of the Tribulation to bring pressure upon Israel and to drive them to hunger for their Messiah. Then, when the message of the Gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed, the multitudes from Israel will come to believe in Jesus as Messiah. They will find Him. God is going to work in the lives of the Israelites so that they will be driven to search and seek after Him until they come to recognize that Jesus is indeed the Messiah (Jer. 29:11-13, Amos 5:4).

Salvation: A Free Gift

The picture Jesus painted in this parable is of a man searching for a costly pearl. Upon finding it, he desires to secure it. He then sells everything he owns to purchase the pearl. The parable of the hidden treasure ended with the same action: the individual sells everything to buy the field in which the treasure is buried. This presents a problem since it appears that people are “buying” their salvation.

Jesus said that new birth is essential for entrance into the kingdom, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). In other words, you and I get into God’s kingdom by believing in Jesus Christ. It was because Abraham believed God, that God declared him righteous (Gal. 3:6). Anyone who has ever been saved from the beginning of time until eternity will have been saved by faith in the revelation God has given of Himself, centering on the Person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Salvation is the result of the grace of God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8,9).

The parable of the pearl and the treasure demonstrate that once

a person sees the overwhelming value and importance of the kingdom, he will desire it for himself, whatever the cost. Salvation was, is and always will be free and without cost. The meaning of “buying” in this context is to secure it for your own possession. The point is not the price that is paid. If you say to someone, “Did you buy your house or are you renting?” you are really asking, does your home belong to you or does it belong to someone else? That is the concept behind the idea of buying or purchasing in these parables—securing it for ownership. It is the picture of a person who will let nothing stand in the way of his coming into possession of the King and His kingdom.

An analogy is also drawn in the Old Testament, “Buy truth, and do not sell it. Get wisdom and instruction and understanding” (Prov. 23:23). This is not saying that if you come up with enough money you can acquire the truth. The point in “buying” the truth is to do whatever is necessary to acquire wisdom, instruction and understanding.

God invited Israel to come and secure His blessings without paying any money, “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat” (Is. 55:1). The concept is to “buy” without money, without cost; to do whatever is necessary to secure it.

Eternal salvation cannot be purchased from Christ. It is free. But you can buy it from the standpoint that you secure it from Him. You can acquire from Him what is necessary to enable you to stand righteous before God.

Let Nothing Keep You From the Kingdom

The point of buying the field or buying the costly pearl is to recognize the overwhelming importance and value of the kingdom and the King and to allow nothing to keep you from them. In the context of true biblical faith, there must be the realization that Jesus Christ, and He alone, is the One in whom you must place all your confidence, all your trust, for your eternal destiny. Apart from that, there can be no salvation.

Christ must be number one in all your life. Whether that be your family (Matt. 10:37), your physical needs (Matt. 6:33) or even your eyes or hands (Matt. 5:29,30), your relationship with Christ

must be the most important area of your life. Jesus does not want anything to keep a person from the glorious kingdom.

When the rich, young ruler came to Christ, he came with the question, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” (Matt. 19:16). The issue was the price of the acquisition of eternal life. “Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’” (v. 21). In essence, Jesus said to abandon everything and place your total confidence in Me. “But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property” (v. 22). He thought the cost was too great!

Isn't that amazing? The rich, young ruler asked the Messiah of Israel how he could have eternal life as his own possession, but when Jesus told him to abandon everything and place his faith in Him alone, he thought the cost was too great. Jesus does not ask everyone to give away all that he has to become His follower, but Scripture indicates that He demands of everyone that same attitude.

The most important thing in all the world is to belong to Jesus Christ, to have eternal life in Him. The Apostle Paul stressed this in his letters to the churches:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil. 3:7-9).

Humanly speaking, everything went downhill for Paul from the day he was saved. Before his conversion he had prestige, influence and probably a degree of wealth. Afterward, he had Christ and His righteousness. Paul had an eternal treasure of great value.

What about you? Have you been searching to fill a void in your life? Regardless of your situation, the central issue is that you are a sinner separated from a holy God. Only by believing in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation will you be granted eternal life and a place

in His kingdom. Christ must be more important to you than anything else.

The Kingdom Will Come

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20).

When Jesus finished teaching these parables of the kingdom, He turned to His disciples and asked, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes" (Matt. 13:51). They had come to understand that He was revealing new information about the character of the kingdom and God's plan for preparing a people for the kingdom. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that He would rule over an earthly kingdom. However, they did not understand that the kingdom was not imminent. They could not see, as we can, that at least two thousand years would pass before the setting up of the kingdom.

Only a few years after Christ's ascension, mocking unbelievers had already caused the Christians to begin doubting the reality of an earthly kingdom. Peter addressed their fears by writing:

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation" . . . But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:3,4,8,9).

Peter did not stop there. He went on to challenge them:

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens

and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you (2 Pet. 3:11-15).

The same challenge applies to us today. We need to conduct ourselves in light of what Christ has done for us on the cross. As we look forward to His kingdom, we will conduct our lives so that they will bring glory and honor to His name.

The Rapture of the Church will take place and the Great Tribulation will come. Jesus Christ will return to the earth to set up His kingdom. Peter reminded the believers that God will not forget His promise. This is a message that permeates the entire Bible. God will keep His promises; His words are true!

The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times. You, O LORD will keep them; You will preserve him from this generation forever (Psalm 12:6,7).

It is important for us to know what God says about the kingdom. We can have confidence in what God is doing in the world today. He challenges us to share the Gospel with those who have not heard; and motivates us to live in a way that will bring honor to His name until He comes.

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Other Books by Gil Rugh

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