

Matthew 13:18-23

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 July 2024

Preacher: Ray Kelly

[0 : 00] We're still in Matthew 13, and before we engage with Matthew 13, there's just something I want to refer to from a few weeks back, which I meant to do promptly and then forgot.

But you may remember that we were, back in Matthew 12, from verse 46 to the end, we had this passage that challenged us about how we deal with relationships and how we should value relationships.

And we should value relationships the way the Lord values relationships. And that actually transcends our earthly families, that our brothers and sisters in Christ are actually more important than our brothers and sisters in the flesh.

Although sometimes we're blessed, and our brothers and sisters in the flesh are also brothers and sisters in Christ. But Joe said something, and you know there's, there's occasions when somebody says something to you and you think, I wish I'd said that.

But he said as we left, those relationships that we have here, those relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, are the only relationships we have eternally.

[1 : 18] So if our flesh and blood brothers and sisters are saved, then we have relationships with them eternally. But all the rest of the people out there who we might be trying to impress, we don't have an eternal relationship with them.

We only have an eternal relationship with the saved. And I thought that was a profound point that I completely forgot to make. In fact, I didn't. That's not true. I didn't spot it.

And Joe did. So thank you for that, Joe. Matthew 13. You may remember that we had dealt with the beginning of the parable of the sower.

Actually, I'm going to turn the projector off because it will just be a distraction. You may remember, we tried to approach the parable of the sower the way they would have received it.

And so there was this big crowd and Jesus gets up when he gets up in his boat and he's speaking to the crowd on the beach and he says, behold, the sower went out to sow.

[2 : 26] And we reflected upon the fact that for the most part, that crowd would have gone, what is he talking about? What is this about? And after he got down to what we have as verse nine, he who as he has let him hear, they probably all wandered off scratching their heads.

And then later, some came back. And the ones that came back, he gave the explanation to that we're about to read. But during that, during those few verses, between verse 10 and 17, what we had was an explanation of the fact that God was deliberately hiding stuff from people who had rejected him.

And we talked about the fact that quite often people are given over to things if they continually reject Christ. So you might remember that he had done everything to verify who he was.

He did messianic miracle after messianic miracle. He taught in a completely unequivocal and visible way up to this point. And that this is the turning point of his ministry.

It's the point where he stops teaching them in ways they can easily understand. And he stops doing miracles for their benefit. And he starts teaching in parables. And when he teaches in parables, only those who haven't rejected him chase after him and say, what did you mean?

[4 : 0 0] What was that about? The rest just went away, scratching their heads. And so only the true disciples, the true followers, the ones who have not rejected him, continued after him to find out what he was meaning.

And when they asked him for more signs, he simply said, no, you're not getting any more signs apart from the sign of Jonah, which is the sign of the resurrection.

And there was the resurrection of Lazarus. And there are something like 40 odd verses devoted to that. I think it's in John chapter 10. And then his own resurrection, which was yet to come.

But other than that, he stopped doing signs for the Jews. And this is the time at which the ministry of the Jews to the Gentiles has ceased. And it's the verse that persuades large chunks of the church that God has finished with Israel.

And we are not among those. God has not finished with Israel by any stretch of the imagination. However, he had finished with Israel for the moment.

[5 : 1 4] And so the coming kingdom where the Jews were supposed to be involved in the coming of the kingdom was postponed. And it was postponed while the church age took place.

And the fulfillment of that prophecy, which is the fulfillment of Daniel's 70th week, another Bible study entirely. But there are seven years of Jewish history yet to come where this prophecy for the Jews being fulfilled and coming into the kingdom will take place.

They missed it first time round. But God has not finished with Israel. And it's unfortunate that so many churches will tell you that the church is now Israel.

And it is not. There are lots of reasons why we should be glad it's not. But that's for another day. So we get to this point. And he gives this explanation.

Let's read it. So we're going to start in verse 18. And we're just going to read to verse 23. Here 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.

[6 : 2 8] This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.

Yet he has no firm root in himself. But he's 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 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 the seed was sown on good soil. This is the man who hears the word and understands it. Who indeed bears fruit and brings forth some 100 and some 60 and some 30.

And that means a hundred, 60 or 30 fold increase. So, if I were the disciples listening to this, they probably had far more of a grasp on the Old Testament scriptures than I have.

[7 : 3 9] And therefore, it would probably be a very simple thing for them to understand. This parable is contained in three different gospels.

It's in Matthew, Mark and Luke. There are no parables in John. And all three say very slightly different things, though there is no contradiction.

And Matthew says, as we just heard, hear now the parable of the sower. In Mark's account, Jesus is reported to have said, do you not understand this parable?

How will you understand all the parables? So, it then becomes obvious that understanding this parable is key to understanding parables in general.

Now, I'm not going to go into why or how today, but I expect we will come across it because there are 13 parables in Matthew's gospel. So, we will be at some point going through or looking for similarities between the understanding of this parable and those other parables.

[8 : 50] Mark's account, sorry, Luke's account starts with, the parable is this. Now, each then has an introductory statement to suit his intended audience.

And so, as we've done right through Matthew's gospel, we're going to ask, who was Matthew's intended audience? And Matthew was a Jew writing a gospel to Jewish Christians.

So, when he, as had already been read, quoting from Isaiah 6, hearing they will not hear and seeing they will not see, that is during this time of judgment.

So, during this time, the Jews would know, having quoted Isaiah, that this was aimed at them as Jews. So, there is a time of judgment where the promises and the will of God is being held back from the understanding of the Jews, with the exception, of course, being this remnant who had chased after him and said, why are you talking parables?

And what do they mean? So, Isaiah 6 and earlier in this chapter says that they will not hear.

[10 : 23] Hearing they will not hear. And this suggests an element of volition. It suggests the engagement of the will.

Quite often, this is simply, oh, I'm just confused and I didn't get it. But what I think is suggested here, and I'm happy to be corrected if you disagree, but what I think is suggested is they will not hear.

As in, they refuse to hear. There's an engagement of the will to blank Jesus out, which I think is what we have seen in the chapters up to this point, and certainly in the earlier part of chapter 12, where they rejected him completely.

So, the will of the people was engaged to reject him, and therefore they will not hear. It's a bit like our children sometimes when we say, don't do that.

And they go and do it. Did you not hear me? Well, I chose not to. Would be the honest response. We have a similar example in Revelation 22, verse 17, which talks about our salvation.

[11 : 38] If you just quickly flip to that. Revelation 22. And verse 17.

The spirit and the bride say, come. Sorry, I'm rushing ahead. Is everybody there? Yeah. The spirit and the bride say, come. And let the one who hears say, come.

And let the one who is thirsty, come. Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. Now, where it says the one who wishes, many of you, if you've got an old King James or a different version, it will say, whoever wills may come.

I've got desires. Desires is another one. So, it has this connotation, not of just failing to hear, you know, sorry, my ears were bunged up, but a deliberate choice to hear or not hear.

Which is actually very important when you think of the parable of the sower and the description of the hearts into which the seed of the word is being sown. What is their response?

[12 : 52] And their response is likened unto the depth or shallowness of the soil. So, what about the crowd?

Well, the crowd, when Jesus spoke to them after he did the messianic miracle, they chose not to hear him.

Now, by teaching in parallel, in parables, and by the hardening of their hearts, he's made it so they can no longer hear him.

So, this whole idea that we read about in Romans chapter 1 of being given over to something, you go from, I will not listen, I will not listen, I will not listen, to, I cannot any longer listen, I cannot take it in anymore, I am, I have become spiritually blinded or spiritually deaf.

It's a progress from persistent sin that when anyone, and in this case it was a national thing, but when anyone gets to the point where they say, I absolutely refuse Jesus, there is no longer a way forward.

[14 : 04] They've been given over to their own decision, which is a tragic thing. Now, we've got another subtle difference, and that is Matthew talks about the word of the kingdom.

Mark simply talks about the parable, and Mark, sorry, Luke, tells us that the seed is the word of God.

So, the word of God, and the word of the kingdom, and the parable, are all the word of God, in some way or other, aren't they?

They all carry the impact that it's, what's being talked about is God's word. So, the seed is God's word. And there are people who would spend time differentiating between the word of God and the word of the kingdom.

The reason that the Jews would be told the word of the kingdom is because Jesus had come to bring in the kingdom for the Jews, and had now withdrawn the offer for now.

[15 : 16] So, Jesus talking to the Jews in particular, would use this expression, the word of the kingdom.

My point is only that they both mean the word of God. And so, what we need to take on board, who's the sower?

Well, it's obviously Jesus, because Jesus came, and he was called the word. In John's gospel, we read, in the beginning was the word, and the word was God, and the word was with God.

And the word, in verse 14, and the word became flesh, and dwelt amongst us. I would also find myself thinking that once we have received the word and been born again, we all become sowers.

And I'm not saying we become divine. Don't mix me up with the word faith movement. But we all sow the word, do we not? At least that's the plan.

[16 : 22] And then, and this is, I think, an important distinction, and that is, in the Bible, you will find that there are two different ways of expressing the word, the word of God.

There's the word of God, which you see in Greek as logos, and there's the word of God that you see in Greek as rhema. And the parable of the sower talks about the logos.

And why is that important? I'm so glad you asked. The rhema word is often referred to as, it's the now word.

So, if, an asinine example, but if you lost your cat, and you prayed, and you said, Lord, where's my cat? And the Lord said, in the shed.

And you then went to the shed and found your cat. That's the rhema word. It's the word that answers you in the now, provides a solution for the now.

[17 : 25] Most prophetic words are the rhema word. Because, God tells you what's going to happen. How is that different from the logos word?

The logos word embodies his character and nature and wisdom. It's not do X in Y circumstance.

It's, this is what I'm like. This is what I love. This is what I want you to be like. I want you to emulate me.

In order for you to emulate me, I need to tell you about me. I need you, I need to unwrap for you my character. So, in terms of parenting, because God is our father, I would align it with when you take your children and you introduce them to the things that you really love.

And you let them know what you're really like. And that has a massive influence on the whole life of that child. Which is why, in the current era, we have so many miscreant children because they're taking after their fathers.

[18 : 39] But the role model setting is part of sharing your logos. If I want to get to know Joe's logos, I can't do it any other way than spending time with Joe and getting him to share heart with me so that I understand what makes him tick.

and it's not to do with tasks that he might do or answers that he might bring. I need to get my heart entwined with his heart so that we understand each other.

So the parable of the sower talks about the sowing of the seed. And I find this utterly mind-blowing that the perfect God wants to do that with me.

He wants our hearts to become entwined so that I understand him. If we turn to Philippians 3, I just want to start with verse 7.

And I just want us to catch the heart behind this. This is the Apostle Paul. And he says, but whatever things were gained to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[20 : 25] So we say that I'm putting Christ first, isn't he? 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 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, that I may know him.

And the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being conformed to his death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

There's a heart cry in Paul to know him. I want to know him. How do you get to know him? Well, you get to know his logos.

Where is his logos? In this book. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 3.

[21 : 36] Beginning at verse 14. And he spent the first half of the chapter talking about how the Gentiles are co-heirs with the Jews and heirs of Christ and partakers of the promise in verse 6.

Well, when we get to verse 14. He says, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts.

If Christ is going to dwell in my heart, his logos needs to be in here. I can't respond in a Christ-like way if I haven't got Christ's logos living in me.

Right? That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

If I'm going to comprehend God if you if you comprehend something it's not like I used to fix cars and I knew which bits went where but I couldn't design a car so I knew a bit about cars but I didn't comprehend cars but comprehension needed a greater level of understanding than I was ever going to get just by fiddling with cars now what Paul is saying here is he is praying that we will be able to comprehend him where does that comprehension come from verse 17

[24 : 02] Christ dwelling in your heart through faith how does Christ dwell in your heart through faith because his word is lifted off the printed page and written on the human heart turn with me to Jeremiah 31 Jeremiah chapter 31 always helps if you get the right book Jeremiah 31 Jeremiah 31 the key verse is verse 31 well verse 31 and following however let's just paint a little picture of what happened before verse 31 behold this is verse 27 behold days are coming declares the Lord when I will sow we have the sowing analogy again when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast as I have watched over them to pluck up to break down to overthrow and to destroy and bring disaster so I will watch over them to build and to plant declares the

Lord in those days they will not say again the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge but everyone will die for his own iniquity each man who eats the sour grapes his teeth will be set on edge behold days are coming declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by to bring them out of the land of Egypt my covenant which they broke although I was a husband to them declares the Lord but this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days declared the Lord I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it and I will be their God and they will be my people they will not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother saying know the Lord for they will all God's plan was always to write his word his law on the human heart we have it on the printed page somehow we have to transfer it to the human heart and that transition is the seed sowing of the sower and personally

I am moved by the fact that he wants to bother the thing about sowing the seed of course is when you sow a seed you get a plant and the plant contains lots more seeds than you first planted so it's the kingdom the reason the seed is used as an emblem for the kingdom is because it multiplies as the seed is planted assuming the seed finds root in good soil one of the parables we will look at says the kingdom of God is as if a man planted a seed and he goes to bed and gets up and he goes to bed and he gets up and he does not know how it grows but a harvest time comes and he puts in the sickle it's a mystery how you can plant a handful of wheat seeds and get a wheat field so let's go back to the parable of the sower before we do just turn to

John 17 this was Jesus' high priestly prayer it's often called it's often the title of it because I find this moving and I find it miraculous and I find it's one of those things that I really struggle to embrace just because of the magnitude of it in John 17 verses 19 to 21 and he's prayed for the disciples and he's prayed that the disciples would be one both with each other and with the father and with Jesus that there would be this unity thing going on and then he gets to verse 19 and he says for their sakes I sanctify myself that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth

I do not ask on behalf of these alone but for those who believe in me through their word that's us that they may all be one even as you father are in me and I in you that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me that is a simply magnificent picture of almighty God the only perfect being in the universe wanting to unite his heart with mine and yours and praying to the father that it would happen so fervent was his desire for that to happen that he prayed to the father that it would happen it's an awesome thing now in reading our Bibles in in in

[30 : 21] John's gospel verses one and two we read that the logos was in the beginning with God in verse 14 of that chapter we read that that logos became flesh and dwelt among us so the logos is the person of Jesus as well as being the word that he left us with and it's the word that he left us with is sown into our hearts that enables us to appreciate his desire to be one with us now the planting of the seeds go back to the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 what you then have described he says 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 so why would he pick the sower as an example here one of the reasons is the way they sowed seed the way they sowed seed was they sowed it all over the land and they scattered it everywhere and it went on the path and amongst the weeds and in the rocks and everywhere else and it also went in the middle of the field and then they ploughed it in well you can't plough it when it's on the path and you can't plough it when it's among the rocks and you usually don't bother to plough it when it's among the weeds you plough the good soil and when you plough the good soil the seed goes deep and produces its crop so this gives us a useful analogy for our hearts we don't need you don't need further explanation from me about the heart of the one who is like the seed landing on the road side it says the evil one comes and snatches away if you if any of you have tried to plant grouse seed in your gardens you'll find that if you don't cover it up fairly quickly the birds descend and it all goes or far too much of it goes and most of us live in a world where there are lots and lots and lots of distractions and

I've had experience personally of sharing the gospel with people quite often young people but not always young but the young seem more easy to distract and they just start to get to grips with this seed and some distraction will come along and they will just be taken away before it's even had time to make any growth at all it's just gone wasted seed from this I kind of got that it might be wasted seed but God did sow it anyway!

There are no souls that God does not want to sow seed into but some will not be good soil and I couldn't escape in all of this the element of human will Calvinists would disagree with me but the element of human will whether you choose to be good soil or not is a matter of whether you are prepared to make Christ a priority whether you're prepared to put aside the distractions and we'll come back to that as a principle in a moment then we have the one on whom the seed was sown on the rocky places 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 back in this day there was persecution available for people who followed

Christ in our day there's a different kind of persecution and it's called ridicule and peer pressure and things like that where you don't believe that stuff do you you don't do you really and you find yourself ostracised from peer groups and it's so much easier to leave the word aside because the pressures the distractions take over and once again it's wasted seed but nevertheless it's seed that God sows God does not not want those people he wants them he sows the seed there and they have to exercise their will if their hearts are going to be good soil now of course our Calvinist brothers would say well they were just not the elect in the first place and they never were destined for salvation generally I find that hedonism is just more attractive than

Christianity for a lot of them and then there's verse 22 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 so often we're so busy pursuing a career keeping the wolf from the door earning money getting status having ambition overtly expressing your Christianity can mess with your career it doesn't always and quite often the Lord directs us to jobs where it's not a bar but there are times when it is I certainly came across a little bit of persecution when I worked in the civil service Joe recently had a job change and he's discovered he's got

[37 : 08] Christian colleagues which is a real blessing but that doesn't really need much explanation the seed is sown God wants these people but they're too busy I've got to earn a living I've got to get promotion I've got to do this I've got to do that and it just gets pushed to the back of the list it's a shame and then we've got this good soil the man who hears the word and understands it who indeed bears fruit and brings forth some a hundred some sixty and some thirty fold it's particularly poignant that if you turn with me to Romans 10 verse 17 Romans 10 verse 17 says so faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ it's particularly a poignant thing for this time at the parable of the sower when the

Jews the vast majority of the Jews there were told hearing you will not hear and it's only hearing that produces faith so in all of the cases of these seeds they've all had an opportunity to hear it but have they really heard it when it was sown by the roadside too busy when it was sown among the rocky places too busy the good soil is the one who takes time to listen and even further than that the one who says I didn't quite get that can you tell me again Lord the one who goes back and goes back and goes back because he's hungry because I must understand because I want to know him and the power of his resurrection I want to comprehend him those of us who have the privilege of preaching spend hours sometimes agonising over verses to try to bring some clarity to those verses and we always and I'm taking the liberty and speaking for Joe

I'm assuming he finds it the same as I do at the end of it all you come away with something that is wonderful and yet you still feel like you've only just scratched the surface and there is so much more because I don't yet comprehend him completely lost myself in Psalm 119 verse 105 we learn that the word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path so if and I'm going to use this word advisedly if we choose to be poor soil and there are many who would say oh but you can't choose because you don't have free will and all the rest of it if we choose to be poor soil and if the word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path what happens to me when I walk

I'm going to fall over my path is unlit a very dangerous situation for me to be in and there are the topic is not without its conflict or apparent conflict if you turn with me for a moment to Isaiah 55 Isaiah 55 starting in verse gosh you could start in verse one but I won't we'll start in verse eight for my thoughts are not your thoughts nor nor nor are your ways my ways declares the Lord so that leaves me immediately wanting to know what are his thoughts and what are his ways well where do I find that out well by getting around the outside of his logos where do I get that from here for for as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts

I want it even more now for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater so will my word be which goes forth from my mouth it will not return to me empty without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it for you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace and the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands God has said his word will go forth in the earth and will bear the fruit that he wanted it to bear it will accomplish the thing he sent it to do the dilemma is well what about where the seed fell on rocky ground what about what about what about and my only answer to that is yes God's will will be accomplished in those who allow their hearts to be good soil because it's always been the case though we read in Ezekiel it's not God's will for any man to perish a large number will perish and so in the final analysis those who have made their hearts available to his word will be saved and will be going forward with him into the millennial kingdom and beyond so what you have then is if you take the analogy that I've already spoken of what they used to do with the seed is scatter it all over the field and then plough the field our hearts need to be ploughable if we're hard-hearted we're a bit stuck the plough won't go there and won't do any good when it does go there but to be in that deep soil in the middle of the field our hearts need to remain ploughable doesn't time fly when you're having fun in the notes there will be a load of verses for you to consider but I want to just finish with one verse although I will mention in passing

[44 : 56] Psalm 119 verse 11 David said I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you when the logos of God comes into the heart sin begins to take a back seat and the more the word is in there the less you sin finish with this Matthew chapter 15 ooh well that's not the right verse no it's not verse I was going to say verse 8 but it's verse 11 but we'll start with verse 10 after Jesus called the crowd to him he said to them hear and understand it is not what enters into the mouth that defiles a man but what proceeds out of the mouth that defiles a man in another place it says the heart speaks out of that which the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart if we have any hope whatsoever of having control over what we do with our words whether we hurt people whether we bless people whether we further the kingdom of God or whether we don't if we have any chance of gaining that control our hearts need to be full of

God's word so that in response to any given situation it's God's logos that comes out not all the vitriol and anger and other stuff that could come out what comes out of the mouth not what goes into the mouth this was said to Jews and Jews of course had all these dietary laws and Jesus was saying look it doesn't matter what you eat it just gets eliminated but what you speak that's what matters so my prayer for us is that God's word will become what we speak father thank you for this word and whilst I've much exercised by it I kind of feel like I haven't really done it justice because it's such a big topic but lord I pray that your word will become magnetic to us that we will be won't want to leave it alone we will want to consume it we will want it to infuse every fibre of our being we will want to be those to whom people will go and receive your logos and come to know you and that we too would come to know you and the power of your resurrection that we would come to comprehend you in

Jesus name amen amen amen voy