

Matthew 13

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[0 : 00] Do open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 13. Matthew chapter 13 is something to have lots of business here this morning. We're going through Matthew's Gospel. We've reached chapter 13. And the parable also last week, it was so sunny wasn't it, Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon I thought well right it's time to sort out the lawn and I went out and I've sowed seed all over the lawn.

A seed with rye grass in it. A seed that grows supposedly in shady areas. Quick drying but none of it seems to be growing at all. And I feel I've lived with this parable this week. I keep going out to the garden and seeing kind of please grow this grass.

Anyway, I want to get straight into Matthew 13 because how seed grows and flourishes is an absolute mystery isn't it? How it takes root, how it grows, well to me it's a total mystery. That's my first point.

The mystery of Jesus' kingdom. Jesus says that in verse 11 actually doesn't he? In verse 11 he says, he answers them, to you it has been given to know the secrets. Maybe a different version you've got says the mystery of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them it has been given. For to the one who has, more will be given and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

[1 : 27] The secret, the mystery of the kingdom of heaven. What is this story in verses 3 to 9, what has it got to do with the kingdom of heaven?

Or with being a mystery or a secret in the kingdom? Probably the other story, quite well. The sower, he goes out and he sows the seed and some of it falls onto the beaten path.

Probably a walkway between the narrow strips, a narrow strip between the fields outside the village. And of course a path and the soil is beaten down and the seed can't get through it. So it just lies on the surface.

And before it is ploughed, the birds come and pick up the seed. And there's some seed which falls on rocky soil. It's not that it's infested with rocks and stones.

But there's this layer of limestone rock underneath a thin layer of soil. And it can't be detected how thin the soil is until the plough goes through it.

[2 : 31] It doesn't have much depth to the soil. So that means the seed, well it tends to wither when the sun comes out. And then there's the seed which goes amongst the thorn plants.

And it gets choked. Then there's finally the fourth seed which gets sown on the good soil, on the good ground. And that bears much fruit. And we might say, well, it's very primitive isn't it?

We might be very critical of the farmer's method. Why does he take his precious seed and throw it all over the piss? Why does he take it away from the unproductive areas?

And we've got to remember that in Palestine at that time, ploughing came after sowing. So you would not plough your ground first like we would, and then sow your seed.

But you would sow your seed, and then you would go and plough it. And so you couldn't normally detect what the ground was like right from the off. So until it was ploughed, you cast your seed everywhere.

[3 : 35] And the focus is on the sower. The sower, Jesus says, goes out to sow. And he sows, and various things happen. Now how is that a secret? On earth is that mystery of Jesus' kingdom.

What has this illustration of seed being sown got to do with the kingdom of God? A sower goes out to sow. Well, Jesus calls it, doesn't it, in verse 19, can you see it? The word of the kingdom. It seems to be something like this.

Every Jew, they knew, and they believed, that the kingdom of God was coming. They were looking for it. That the kingdom of God would come. King David would have a greater son, and he would come in power and great glory.

And the kingdom of God, when it came, was a harvest. It was a judgment. It was the end. It was the climax of history. When evil would be rooted out, and Israel would be restored. When righteousness would be vindicated. The time that God would come to his people, and he'd set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed. When Jesus, the Messiah would rule in justice and righteousness.

[4 : 48] It was the climactic episode that brought the end of the usual process of history. The Messiah would take his reign in blazing power and splendor.

But Jesus is saying, there are secrets to the kingdom. And he's comparing in the kingdom parables of Matthew 13.

He says the kingdom is like this. The kingdom is like the sower without the sower. What's that got to do with the kingdom? Well, Jesus seems to be saying something like this.

That before that day of judgment. Before the great and climactic day. Before the kingdom comes in power and in glory. It's already come. It's already come in a silent and quiet way.

It's come in a veiled fashion. You might almost say, it's come in a commonplace way. The kingdom has come in an obscure way. That instead of seeing it to be the irresistible kind of kingdom.

[5 : 53] Which comes in power and that imposes itself. And rules. Instead, the kingdom of God has come in a fragile way. And the kingdom of God is like a sower.

That goes into a field and he sows. And the seed of that kingdom. Well, it can be resisted. And it can be rejected. And the seed of that kingdom will not necessarily be productive.

And Jesus seems to be saying something like this. The kingdom has already come. And you are caused to respond to it. How has the kingdom come?

Well, the kingdom has come in the sense that the king has come. And the king has come not in great power. And not in great glory. And so when Jesus said in Matthew 4.17.

To repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. He meant the kingdom has come because the king has come. And the king has come in humility. Born in the manger. Brought up in obscurity.

[7 : 00] And humility. He's not come in great power and glory. But nevertheless the king is here. In a low key way. And the kingdom of God is veiled.

And quiet. And low key. And the sower is sowing the word. You might be offended because of that. Because it's not what you were expecting. And you might be offended because the kingdom of God seems so fragile. That you can reject the king. Because he doesn't come in such glory.

But in humiliation. And you must watch that. The mystery of God's kingdom. Because since he doesn't come in blazing glory this time.

You may be tempted to think. Well there's nothing to it. And you might be tempted to turn away from it. There's no story about a man who went to church. Into a church in the Netherlands.

[8 : 07] He was a scholarly looking man. But he was plainly dressed. And he walked into the church. And he walked down to one of the seats in the front. And he took his seat.

He was a visitor. It so happens that an elderly woman came down the aisle. And she saw that he was sitting in her seat. So she curtly asked him. Basically to get out. And to vacate.

The man was a little bit shocked. He quietly got up. And he went to a section where some of the poorer people sat. And he devoutly joined in the service. After the service.

One of the woman's friends came up to her and said. Do you know who it is whom you ejected from your pew? She said no I don't. But he was just some ordinary stranger.

And her friend said. Oh no. That was King Austria of Sweden. He's here to visit the Queen. You see. It's really easy. Isn't it? Just because something is commonplace.

[9 : 03] Or someone doesn't seem to have a lot of splendour. Pizarres about them. Doesn't mean that it's advisable for you to despise them. To reject them.

And just because Jesus has not come in blazing splendour of his messianic glory. When he brought the first instalment of the kingdom.

You better be careful. You better be careful you're not put off Christianity. Because the kingdom has come quietly. Because this morning we are a very, very, very ordinary people.

And we are common. Just because he began proclaiming the word. That the king was at cure already. You'd better be careful.

Not to reject the king. Just because you expect him to be more supernatural. More professional. Or great.

[10:02] He shows us the mystery of the kingdom. That it came quietly. Secondly. Do you see the manner of Jesus teaching? Look at verse 10 to 4.15. The manner of Jesus teaching. It tells us, doesn't it?

That Jesus taught many things in parables. The disciples, they come to Jesus. They say, what are you doing speaking in parables? Why these stories?

Why these puzzles? Why these riddles? Why these enigments? And these episodes, they are kind of riddles. And the listeners, and we this morning, we have to try and figure out.

What is Jesus saying? So why speak in parables? And Jesus gives them a divine reason and a human reason. The divine reason, he says in verse 11. He says, I do it because, to you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

But to them it has not been given. Isn't that shocking? He says, I speak to them in parables because it has not been given to them to know the secrets of the kingdom.

[11:08] If I know the kingdom. If I know what the kingdom of God is about. And when it counts. If I know the king of the kingdom. That's only by a divine gift.

By which I recognise it. But to those who it has not been given. Everything takes place in parables. It's obscured. It's not clear. It's veiled. And now he gives them a human reason too.

And Matthew doesn't seem to see any conflict between the divine reason of verses 11 and 12. And a human reason in verse 13. He says in verse 13.

This is why I speak to them in parables. Because seeing they do not see. And hearing they do not hear. Nor do they understand. What's he saying? He's saying they see but they don't really see.

They hear but they don't really hear. They don't understand. And I'm speaking to them in parables this way. Because they don't really receive. Or want to receive what I'm saying.

[12:14] Now go back to Matthew 11 and 12. Do you remember those chapters? We've looked at them. And we would have seen that in every episode of those two chapters. Jesus is having to deal with the unbelief of Israel. They don't believe.

They don't believe and they will not receive him. And they weren't receiving his word. And as they come from that. Jesus is saying of Israel on the whole.

They've not been receiving me. They don't want to hear me. They hear my words but they don't really hear me. They won't receive my words. And so because of them not receiving.

I speak to them in riddles and parables. And in enigments. And Jesus quotes in verses 14 and 15 of our passage. From Isaiah chapter 6. And Jesus says it's like today.

Just like it was in Isaiah's day. Isaiah's prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes. Hearing you will not hear. Seeing you will not see.

[13:11] And your heart has grown dull. Why won't they receive? Why won't they get God's word? Why can't they receive the truth? Well can you see what it says?

It says their hearts where it's 15 have become dull. And their ears they can barely hear. And their eyes have been closed. They don't want to receive God's truth.

They don't want it. They don't want to see it. So they refuse adamantly to believe. And because of that. They can still see. And they can still hear.

Though they can't hear. And they can't see. They hear the words but they won't get it. They see the truth but they won't see it. In other words Jesus is saying something like this.

The way Jesus is teaching in parables. Was a way in which he concealed and hid things. And he veils the truth of the kingdom. For those who do not want to receive it.

[14:13] Let me try and apply this to you. What it means is that God's truth. God's word has a cutting edge. It is a cutting edge. And if you reject it.

And if you put it off. And if you refuse to welcome it. In the end he will take that word away from you. That which is not desired.

Will be withdrawn by God. And that's what Jesus is doing here. The manner of my teaching is done in parables. For Israel at large.

They don't want to receive it. So I use parables to veil and conceal that word. Even though he explains it to his disciples privately. Now that's really different. From what you and I often hear about the parables.

Some of them say. But all the parables. They are delightful little stories. Wonderful little stories. And that is the way that we should try and teach.

[15:13] In beautiful little stories. Jesus taught in parables. Because he wanted to be simple. And he wanted to be interesting. And he wanted to be clear. But that isn't what Jesus says at all.

Jesus said. I teach in parables. Because. That is part of God's judgment. It is a process of withdrawing.

The word from his people. Who don't want to hear it. It is a way of hiding the word of the kingdom. That people don't want to have any truck. With what that means. And so that says to you and I this morning.

It is an awesome responsibility. To hear the word of God. We spent. I don't know how many millions.

Two and a half. Three million on a building. But all my friends mock me. About this. Lecture. I think it costs about \$14.99 on Amazon. It is very depressing. To have to preach from this thing.

[16:08] And so I have got the architect. And some others. To design a kind of. Paul Levy-esque lecture. Which costs hard to its money. That is the thought. But one of the things that I want.

Lots of people have texts. On lectern. Presbytee. Somebody have a burning bush. A bush that burns. But not consumed. Lots of them have nice texts. I think on our pulpit.

What we should have. Is a skull and crossbones. And it should have a skull and crossbones. Somewhere on it. Because it is a dangerous thing. To hear the preaching of God's word. It is a dangerous thing.

Because it is a great privilege. And it is a great responsibility. And every time you come and hear a sermon. There is danger. And judgment rests upon us. If we will not receive it.

And I think this presses upon us. As Christians. Particularly those who claim to be. Reformed Christians. Who claim that our church. Has got a high view in the Bible. And we really think.

[17:09] That actually this is God's word. That we need to be especially careful. A sermon is a very dangerous thing to hear. And so do you realise.

That after all the exposure. That you have to the word of God. That maybe this morning. You are still outside of the kingdom. And you have never received. And you have never submitted. To the king who has come.

And after all that life. You are still resisting. To the Lord Jesus Christ. And you refuse to enter his kingdom. Well woe to you. Because there may come a time.

When you sit in this church. And you can hear. But not hear. And you can understand. But you cannot understand. And your conscience. Has been utterly hardened. And on that last day.

What a responsibility. Will be yours. That you heard. But you refuse to hear. And so you need to be aware. Because of the manner.

[18:06] Of what Jesus is here. The teaching here. Thirdly. Jesus shows us. The mirror. For Jesus people. The mirror. For Jesus people. And you see that.

In verses 18 to 22. And Jesus explains. The parable of the sower. And he takes some time. To concentrate. On the different kinds of soil. And he says to them. Verse 18. It's very emphatic.

You. And the you there. Is very very emphatic. You there. Will hear the parable of the sower. It's as if he's saying. You this morning. You need to investigate.

What type of fury you are. Lest there be any of these tendencies. In you. So hold up this passage. As a mirror. That you can look into. What does Jesus say?

Well he says. First there's this one response. It's the response of those. The seed is sown on the path. Between the fields. And we can sum up this response. As the word does not reach me.

[19:04] The word does not reach me. Obviously. If the seed is sown on the path. It's going to be beaten down. It's not going to sink in. It's going to get ploughed under. So the birds are going to come and take it.

That sort of person hears the word. And the evil one. Comes and snatches away the seed that was sown. The word doesn't reach it. He's hardened. It doesn't penetrate. It doesn't get through.

So you know. There's cartoons. The cartoon character. Has kind of an invisible shield. I think it's in. The Incredibles isn't it? One of them.

Is it Violet? I think in The Incredibles. And she puts a shield over her. And no matter what comes to her. It bounces off the shield. You can't see it. I might have got the cartoon wrong.

I've got the cartoon right away. And so you could throw a rock. You could throw a gun. You could throw bullets. But it hits the invisible shield. And then it just bounces off. And there are Christians like that.

[20 : 02] No matter what sermons they hear. Or there are people like that. Nothing penetrates. Nothing gets through. In the 18th century. There was a famous evangelist.

Called George Whitefield. And he was friendly with Benjamin Franklin. President. They were on fairly intimate terms. Whitefield kept pressing Franklin with the gospel.

Kept speaking to him about it. Franklin had been doing experiments in electricity. And Whitefield said. He'd heard of his work. He'd unraveled some of the mysteries of electricity.

So Whitefield wrote to Franklin. And he says. I would now humbly recommend your delight. And unprejudiced pursuit. And study the mystery of the new birth. Of being born again. It's the most important and interesting study.

And when mastered. It will richly answer and repay you. For all your pains. Because one at whose bar. We are shortly to appear. Has solemnly declared. That without the new birth.

[20 : 58] We cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Because the kind of thing. Whitefield kept pressing. Upon Franklin. Pressing. To present Christ towards him. And Franklin said. After Whitefield's death.

Mr. Whitefield used to pray for my conversion. But he never had the satisfaction. Of believing. That his prayers were heard. The word may not ever penetrate. The king may not ever get through to you.

And there can sometimes be that kind of response. Amongst God's genuine people. There can be a tendency in that direction. If you notice as you grow older. That somehow the word of God.

Doesn't catch you like it used to. And it doesn't always get through. Have you asked yourself. What would it take for God's word.

To change me in a major way. Some belief that I hold contrary. To the word of God. And the word shows. That it's wrong. What would it take for me to change that belief.

[22 : 04] Or it shows us something. I do it. That I know is wrong. What would it take. For God to change me. To have an attitude.

That needs to be transformed. And if the scripture shows me that. Would I bow to it. Would I be willing to change. What would it take for God to get through to you. And isn't it true.

That sometimes as we get older. We just kind of get set. In I'm going to believe what I'm going to believe. And we can almost say. Can't we. Well it doesn't really matter. What the Bible says.

I'm just going to keep on believing it. So I'm going to keep on doing it. And we need to be aware. Of that tendency. Second response. To the word. Is. The word no longer excites me. That's verses 20 and 21.

The word no longer excites me. And the word. Falls on rocky soil. And immediately. They receive it with joy. And they've got. So much joy. And it seems to be.

[23 : 01] That the absence. That the joy. Seems to be related. To kind of the absence. Of depth. In this case. And there's a thin layer of soil. No real roots.

The sun comes up. And it withers. There's no depth. Lots of enthusiasm. But no root. And Jesus. A word for that. In verse 21. He says.

That person is temporary. And when affliction. Or difficulty comes. Immediately. They take offense. And you have to be careful of that. I go and speak to students.

Sometimes. They don't ask me much anymore. Because I'm so grumpy. With them. I just can't bear the singing. One of the reasons. I can't bear the singing. Is I. I just. I'm very very nervous.

Now we are pretty emotionless. And we need to. We need to. Be a bit more emotional. But I. I do think. It's easy. To look at the emotional response. Of some.

[23 : 56] More charismatic singer. And you think. I'm not like that. I feel terribly. I don't feel like. Jubilation. That makes me want to dance. And kind of get that. There may be something. In that.

But I don't. We need to be. Very careful of that. And very nervous. On it. The word no longer excites me.

And something has come along. And I. Used to be enthused over Jesus. But now I'm just disappointed. In Jesus. And I found out. That actually. If I belong to Jesus. That's going to involve. Kind of pressure.

And kind of ridicule. And affliction. And I'm just. Disappointed in Jesus. And the word. No longer excites me. I constantly meet people like that. Spurgeon says.

He once knew. Spurgeon was a great. Nineteenth century preacher. He says. I knew one of these. Rocking ground hearers. And he seemed to be. One of the most spectacular. Conversions of my

ministry. He was in the village.

[24 : 57] Of Waterbeach. In the very early days. Of my ministry. And this guy. Was the leader. Of everything. And bad. And evil. He would be. Drunk. Blind drunk. In the street. Two or three times a week. He would blaspheme.

And curse. And swear. And there were fires. That were set. In the neighbourhood. That people said. He'd start it. There was this kind of. Penchant. Towards evil.

But behold. The buzz. That went through the chapel. On the morning. When Tom so and so. Came to hear me. Spurgeon preached. Spurgeon said. He fell in love with me. He loved to listen. And Spurgeon said.

He loved to listen to him. But that was probably. The only conversion he had. But it led to change. Tom so and so. He quit his swearing. And his drinking. The pub lost his best customer. He persevered.

For six. Maybe nine months. And he would come. To Sabbath worship. And then he'd come. To midweek. And he would talk about. What God had done. In his life. And he would pray. Rough. Manly prayers. Rough. Kind of language.

[25 : 53] But as soon as I heard. Those prayers. Spurgeon said. I marked him down. As one of the brightest stars. In the Redeemer's crown. But then about nine months later. After the most enthusiastic.

Kind of service. For crowd. The jeers of former companions. Began to get to him. The mockery of his former crowd. And he began rather. To slink into public worship. He quit attending. The midweek meeting.

And then pretty soon. He gave up attending worship. He was often warned. And admonished. But on he drifted. Until again. He was found drunk. In the streets. And he was uttering. The blasphemers.

Oath. And he was doing. All those wild. Uncontrollable things. As he'd been doing before. You see. There is such a thing. Isn't that. As great enthusiasm. For Christ. But then the slinking away. The airing away of that. And you and I have to ask ourselves. Do I have some tendency in this way? A great enthusiasm.

[26 : 50] But then when something comes on. When I'm put under pressure. And when the cost of believing in Christ. Is too much. And I'm disappointed in Jesus. And I decide to fade away.

Watch that tendency. Thirdly. There's the one who says. The word must not control me. That's in verse 22. Verse 22.

And for what was so among thoughts. This is the one who hears the word. But the cares of the world. And the deceitfulness of riches. Is choke the word. And it proves unfruitful. A Christ cannot control me.

Because there's so many other parts of life. So many other things. That crowds it out. It chokes the word. I'm not particularly. Organized.

And so my desk. I long to have a clear desk. I got another desk. So I've now got two desks. In my office. In my study. So that one would remain clear. And both are as messy. As the other one now. And people will ring me up.

[27 : 50] About going to speak somewhere. I'm not going to do something. And I'll say. But it's somewhere on the clutter of my desk. And you hear me. Rambling through things. And things get lost. Because there's clutter.

I lost my glasses. Last night. Mother's and my day. Because life. There's so much clutter. Life can have so much clutter. Can't it? So much clutter in life.

It's not only riches. We're good at talking about that. But cares. The anxiety. The age. It comes from the root. That word in verse 22.

Of divisions. Or parts. Life that is divided. Lots and lots of different parts. So many preoccupations. So many fragments. Work. Leisure. Relationships.

They believe. They're interested. Because they believe. That religion. Well it's a part of life. But the word doesn't control them. Life is in bits. It's just one part.

[28 : 49] It's fragmented. And so Christ rules over the religious part. But not over the work life. And not over the leisure life. And not over the sex life. And not over the money life.

And all those things. And there's the tendency. Because those other things will choke out the word. Everything is in parts. Do you have a tendency in that direction?

Jesus says here's a mirror. You're my disciples. See if you see any of these tendencies. These fragments of yourself in this mirror. Dangers into which you fall. So that you. Will not fall into those tragedies yourself. Lastly. Finally. Matthew portrays to us. The motivation for Jesus service. The motivation for Jesus service. Look at verse 23. As what was so not good soil. This is the one who hears the word. Understands it. He indeed bears fruit. And yields. In one case a hundredfold. In another sixty. And in another thirty. [29 : 53] You might listen to me. You just say. Well what's the point in sowing? Three out of four seeds. Don't work. That's the temptation for us.

As a church family. What's the point in telling others? But Jesus is saying to you and I. As you sow the seed. You will see a lot of people.

That are not responsive. And receptive. But there is going to be a harvest. And Jesus is saying. I am going to have my fruitful. All faithful people. Who receive my word. And they bear fruit. And that ought to be a great encouragement. This morning. You never know. The seed that you sow. When the seed is going to produce. Let me quote Spurgeon again. Spurgeon was the preacher. At a great rally in London. At Crystal Palace. When the Indian Mutiny. Was happening. And the royalty of the government. Called for a day of national humiliation prayer. [30 : 53] And Spurgeon was supposed to preach. At the Crystal Palace. Spurgeon went there. A day ahead of time. To see what the venue was like. At the Crystal Palace. Hadn't been designed. For preaching. For such meetings.

And he wanted to test the acoustics. He didn't say. Test him. One, two, three. He took the text. From John 1.29. And Spurgeon bellowed out.

In his voice. He said. Behold the Lamb of God. Who takes away the sins of the world. He said it three times. Several days later.

Someone came to see him. Who said. I was a workman. Working in that building. And he heard. What Spurgeon had said. When he announced that text. Testing the acoustics.

And the message. It can help. Come home to that workman. And they even receive. The Lord Jesus Christ. He'd become a Christian. And you never know. What seed is going to produce.

[31 : 49] And that ought to be. A great encouragement. To preachers. And teachers. And parents. That you don't always expect it.

To bring forth fruit. But God will have a fruitful people. But there are those. Today. Who will receive that word. And for Christian parents.

It really ought to encourage you. Parents who have taught their children. The gospel. Who according to their. Baptismal vows. Have prayed for them. And with them. And you don't know. When. Or where. That seed will take root. And grow. And you may be really discouraged. This morning. You might think. Well it doesn't seem to have taken.

Much root in their lives now. But what I encourage you. When it is. That there is good. There is good ground. And God is going to have.

[32 : 42] A fruitful people. And shouldn't it make a difference. To us this week. As we sow the seed. At the school gate. As we talk about the gospel. With people at work.

And folk will resist. Let's not be embarrassed about that. But you never know. When that seed will produce fruit. Because God is going to have a harvest.

And it ought to be a motivation. For you and I. And us as a church. To keep faithfully sowing. Our little start. At the lunchtime talks.

At the language class. At the children and young people's meetings. On Thursday nights. At the book table. At Sunday school. It's only a seed isn't it. It seems so fragile. We've sown for so long. We've seen so little. But there will be a harvest. And the seed seems so small. It doesn't seem very glorious. You can go to Watford Parish Church.

[33 : 43] And if you go to Watford Parish Church. I think they've fixed it now. But there was. A fig tree growing up. Through the grave. The slab on the top. Of the tomb of the grave.

It had split into three parts. And the fig tree was growing up. Through the middle. And through the sides. Of that tomb. It had opened it up. In its growth.

The grave. Belonged to a man called Ben Wangford. Ben Wangford had been a naval officer. He wished to be buried. With a fig in his hand. And the life of that fig.

Took hold of the death of that hand. And the power of that life. Broke open the death of that tomb. It was only a seed.

And it was only a seed. And the gospel is so. But Jesus says. I am the king. Who is bringing the kingdom of God. And I have come. And it seems obscure.

[34 : 42] And it seems plain. And ordinary. And you don't see the power. The great glory. Yet. But now I am to be received.

And to be followed by you. And it's only a seed. That will produce great fruit. And will bring you to life. In the kingdom of God. Let's pray.