

Memory Verse

“He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’” (Matthew 13:11)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Work [Behavior]
The parables in Matthew 13 are connected to the progression of the church.	God is all-knowing and sovereign.	Treasure and live out the true gospel we have received.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Understanding the Kingdom of Heaven
- B. The Parables of the Heavenly Kingdom
 - 1. The Parable of the Mustard Seed
 - 2. The Parable of the Leaven
 - 3. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure
 - 4. The Parable of the Pearl
 - 5. The Parable of the Dragnet

Life Application

- 1. We must fight against false teachings
- 2. We must treasure the truth
- 3. We must be watchful to the end

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Treasure the truth and be watchful by being a living testimony until Jesus comes again.

Spiritual Teachings

A. Understanding the Kingdom of Heaven

The seven parables in Matthew, chapter 13, all begin with “the kingdom of heaven is like”; therefore, in order to understand the teachings behind the parables, we must first understand what “the kingdom of heaven” is referring to. The phrase is special because it is only found in the Gospel of Matthew. We will find that in the instances where the Gospel of Matthew uses “the kingdom of heaven,” the three other gospel books use “the kingdom of God.” Let us look at an example.

Matthew 13:31	Luke 13:18–19
Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “ The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field.”	Then He said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”

From this, we know that “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” refer to the same thing. We need to understand that the “kingdom of heaven” does not necessarily signify a kingdom located in heaven, but rather refers to a kingdom that belongs to God. So, where is this kingdom? In Luke 17:21, Jesus Christ states that “the kingdom of God is within you,” or in other translations, “in the midst of you.” This implies that His kingdom is His chosen people, which is the church.

B. The Parables of the Heavenly Kingdom

We can view these parables as prophecies concerning what will happen to the people of God, or in other words, the church. From this perspective, let us first look at the two parables we studied last week, the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares.

The parable of the sower illustrates different types of responses to the gospel. There are those who receive it but allow it to wither away, while others allow the gospel to take root deeply in their hearts. The parable of the wheat and the tares is a warning about the false teachers that will appear in the church. They will both grow together until judgment day, when the tares will be separated and burned.

Today, we will study the next five parables of the heavenly kingdom recorded in Matthew, chapter 13, so that we can gain a deeper understanding about the kingdom of God and our place in it.

1. The Parable of the Mustard Seed

“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.’”

(Mt 13:31–32)

Just like a small mustard seed, the people of God were at first small in number. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, there were only about 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). However, after Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, around 3,000 people believed and were baptized (Acts 2:41), and their numbers only grew from there. Just as in the parable, what once was small grew large. Consequently, birds came to rest in its branches. From the explanation of the birds in the parable of the sower, we can understand that the birds in the parable of the mustard seed represent the

wicked one (Mt 13:4, 19). If we examine the history of the apostolic church, we can see that it does indeed follow this pattern. As more believers were added to the church, false teachers and their teachings entered into the church, and the truth was slowly changed. Despite the corruption, the number of believers continued to grow greatly.

2. The Parable of the Leaven

“Another parable He spoke to them: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’”

(Mt 13:33)

The woman who put the leaven into the flour represents the false teachers who bring false teachings into the church. The leaven represents malice and wickedness (1 Cor 5:8). While the birds in the previous parable are identifiable and noticeable in the tree, the leaven in the meal is concealed. The parable illustrates how the corruption completely permeated the apostolic church and changed the truth entirely.

3. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

(Mt 13:44)

The treasure is the true gospel, and this parable illustrates how the true gospel has once again been found after it had been lost (Col 2:3). It represents the reemergence of the truth that is found in True Jesus Church. This treasure is exceedingly precious, and those who wish to gain it must forsake the things of the world for it. Today, we are blessed to have found this treasure, the true gospel. However, do we understand its true value? Apostle Paul understood that the truth of the gospel was more valuable than anything else in this world. As a result, he considered everything else rubbish when compared to the treasure that is Jesus Christ (Phil 3:8).

4. The Parable of the Pearl

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

(Mt 13:45–46)

Similar to the parable of the hidden treasure, the pearl represents the truth. However, from this parable, we can see that the truth was not discovered unexpectedly. The merchant actively sought out beautiful pearls, and when he found one of great value, he knew that his search was over. He had to buy it. In the same way, after the emergence of the true gospel, people have started to search for it. Once they find it, they understand its great value and are willing to give up everything to obtain it. When we have this truth, we cannot take it for granted. Matthew 7:6 instructs us that we cannot throw away our pearls to the swine. Once we have received the truth, we must hold on to it because there is nothing of greater value.

5. The Parable of the Dragnet

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will

come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

(Mt 13:47–50)

Just as in the parable of the wheat and the tares, this parable depicts the judgment in the end time. Similarly, there is also a separation between the good and the wicked. As with the wheat, the good catches are gathered together to be stored, while the bad catches, as with the tares, are burned (Mt 13:30). This is a reminder that when Jesus Christ comes again, we will all have to face judgment.

Check for Understanding

1. **In the context of the parables in Matthew 13, what is the kingdom of heaven?** The church.
2. **How does the kingdom of God equate with the kingdom of heaven?** In the instances where “the kingdom of heaven” is used in the Gospel of Matthew, “the kingdom of God” is used in the other gospel books.
3. **What does the nature of these parables concern?** The progression of the true church.
4. **What does each parable illustrate about the kingdom of heaven?**
 - a. The Parable of the Mustard Seed: Begins small but grows large, resulting in false teachings entering into the church.
 - b. The Parable of the Leaven: False teachings completely permeate the church so that the truth is lost.
 - c. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure: The gospel is once again found after being lost.
 - d. The Parable of the Pearl: The gospel is precious and more valuable than anything.
 - e. The Parable of the Dragnet: Judgment will come upon the church, and the good and wicked will be separated. The wicked will be burned in the fire.

Life Application

The parables of the kingdom of heaven help us to have a better understanding about God’s kingdom, but even more importantly, they remind us of the principles that we must hold on to as Christians.

1. We must fight against false teachings

From the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven, we can see the pattern of Satan’s attack. The birds **dwell in** the tree and the leaven is **put into** the meal. Satan attacks by planting false teachers and heresies in the church (Mt 24:4–5). Knowing this, we must not only be watchful and alert for false teachings, but we must also be well rooted in the truth. This way, we will be able to identify and defend against heresies in the church. Satan has and will continue to attack the kingdom of God until the end of time. Therefore, it is crucial that we remain vigilant and watchful.

Discussion

- Has a church member ever told you anything contrary to the Bible? How did you respond?
- How would you respond to someone who says you receive the Holy Spirit when you are baptized? (*Sample answer: Acts 8:14–17*)
- What can we do to remain watchful against Satan’s deception? (*Sample answers:*)
 - *Pray to the Lord for the wisdom to discern (Jas 1:5; Prov 4:5–6)*
 - *Study the Scriptures ourselves (Ps 119:105)*
 - *Ask pastors or trusted teachers and adults questions if we have doubts.*

2. We must treasure the truth

As people who have already received the hidden treasure and precious pearl, the gospel is our most valuable treasure. However, we often take it for granted. It is a privilege and blessing to be in possession of the truth, but there is a requirement for us to truly receive it. Just as Moses and Paul counted all things of the world rubbish so that they may gain Christ, we must also do the same (Phil 3:8).

What is our treasure?

Matthew 6:21 tells us that where our treasure is, our heart will also be. Even though we know our treasure should be the truth, our hearts are frequently filled with something else. It may be our studies, extracurricular activities, or different types of entertainment. Let us try identifying what our treasure is right now by reflecting upon these questions.

- What do we constantly think about?
- What is the most valuable thing to us right now?

Discussion: How do we value our treasure?

- How do you treat something that you treasure?
- Is this how you treat the true gospel?
- How can we remind ourselves to treasure the true gospel? (*e.g., Meditate on God's words daily, share the gospel with our friends, write down blessings God has given us, etc.*)

3. We must be watchful to the end

The parable of the dragnet warns us that we will all receive judgment. The question is: Are we ready for it? Normally, we are so busy in our daily lives that we don't think too much about the coming of Christ. However, we do not know when He will come, so we must constantly ready ourselves (Mt 24:42). If we put off preparing until the day He comes again, it will already be too late.

So, how do we prepare? Jesus Christ encouraged His disciples to watch because we do not know the day or hour that He is coming. But the act of watching is not passive. We cannot simply sit around doing nothing while waiting for Jesus to come. Instead, we must actively prepare by finding ways to improve ourselves daily.

- Understand God's nature more by studying His word.
- Become "good ground" as in the parable of the sower, by bearing honest, humble, and obedient hearts.
- Pursue the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness as opposed to the desires of this world.

Discussion

- How would we live differently if we knew the exact day that Jesus Christ would come?
- How will you actively watch for the time when Jesus Christ comes again? (*e.g., Treating family members with more love, being more patient with those around us, studying God's word daily*)

Testimony: Finding Hope and a Purpose

Before I came to know Jesus Christ, I was a typical teenager. I went to school every day and hung out with my friends after school. I swore, gossiped, told a lot of lies, and more. I was a wild and active person, but my family was strict. As a result, I would often lie so that my parents would not find out that I had disobeyed them.

I was not happy because my family had a lot of problems. My parents would constantly fight. I also felt that I was the only child who was not loved. In traditional families like mine, sons are favored

over daughters. So, between my older brother and I, I always felt slighted. Since my sister was the youngest child, she was always taken care of and protected. As a result, I started to feel that my parents hated me and that they only took care of me because it was their responsibility.

I did not believe in God because I felt so much suffering, sadness, and depression from the fighting and unhappiness in my family. I would often hide in the bathroom and cry because that was the only place where I could cry. Once, I was so depressed I thought about committing suicide. The only reason why I did not was because I worried that I would have to go to the hospital if my attempt failed.

In the summer of 2002, my cousins came to visit us and started to preach to us. Despite our refusal, they continued to invite us to attend the Student Spiritual Convocation in August. Though I refused to attend, my sister went. When she came back, I asked her what she thought of it and she told me that she liked it and that it was fun.

I started to be more interested in going to church, and my uncle would come and drive my siblings and me to church for the Sabbath. The youths there were very welcoming, and I learned how to pray from a sister. It was a nice experience to be able to express my deepest thoughts and feelings. From then on, I continued to pray often and my sister and I would attend church services regularly with my uncle's family.

In April 2003, I was baptized into the True Jesus Church. After baptism, I began to see the importance of God and His commandments. Every week, I couldn't wait for Fridays and Saturdays to come because Friday night marked the day of rest, and I really enjoyed going to church on Saturday. My relationship with my parents improved because I saw how my suffering built up a strong character. I also reminded myself that I should forgive my parents now that I had found the truth.

I am a very different person compared to who I was before coming to Christ. I used to shed so many tears and was constantly unhappy. But now I understand that for Christians, even though life is not easy and sometimes we shed tears because of our suffering, we still have hope. I used to think that no one could ever understand my pain and suffering because they were not in the same position as I was. But now, whenever I pray, I know that God is there and that He knows exactly how I feel when I cry out to Him. I have nothing to fear because God has already told me that He is my God and that He will be with me.

- Wun-Chiao Cheung, Queens, New York, USA
Manna 59: Find Hope and a Purpose
Also adapted from *Saving Grace*

Memory Verse

"He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.'" (Matthew 13:11)

Meaning

1. Because we are His children, Jesus Christ has revealed to us the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, teachings that are a part of the gospel and therefore must be treasured and reflected upon.
2. These mysteries serve as both warnings and encouragements for us.

Conclusion

It is important that we continue to fight against false teachings, treasure the true gospel, and be watchful until Jesus comes again. Let us continue to live out the truth, so that we can glorify God's name and be a living testimony of His grace to the world!

Lesson 2 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What is the purpose of the mysteries that Jesus gave us regarding the kingdom of heaven?
We can see them as prophecies regarding what will happen to the people of God, and also as warning and encouragement for us.
2. What does the kingdom of heaven refer to in these parables?
It does not simply refer to the place in heaven, but to the place in our hearts. As the Bible implies, the kingdom of heaven is "within our hearts," inferring that the kingdom of heaven is the church itself.
3. What do the birds and the leaven represent? In what ways are they different?
They represent false teachers and heresies within the church. The birds that nest in the mustard tree are visible. However, the leaven is placed within, making it harder to see and consequently more difficult to defend against.
4. What is the difference between the man who found the hidden treasure and the merchant who found the pearl? How did they both respond to the situation?
The man who found the treasure stumbled upon it by accident, while the merchant actively sought out pearls. They both responded by immediately realizing the item's worth and selling all of their possessions to obtain it. They recognized that the item was worth more than all that they had.
5. What is the key teaching in the parable of the dragnet? How does this affect our daily lives?
In the end times, all will be judged and either gathered or cast aside to be burned in the furnace. This affects our daily lives because it teaches us to remember that we do not know when the end times will be, and that all of our actions will be judged.
6. Share one way you will be actively watchful this week.
Personal answers.