

JWB

The Mysteries of the Kingdom

Radio Sermons



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I

The Revealer of Secrets

Matthew 13 sets forth one of the most comprehensive, prophetic revelations of the course of this age found anywhere in the Bible. The mysteries of the "kingdom of the heavens" are magnificently unfolded in parable form by our Lord Himself.

In Matthew 13, the Authorized Version speaks of "the kingdom of heaven." However, this phrase is more correctly translated "the kingdom of the heavens" because in the original Greek manuscripts the word "heaven" is plural — "heavens." Therefore, for the sake of accuracy we shall use the phrase "the kingdom of the heavens."

Our Lord specifically used the word "heavens" to show that the truth taught by the parables of Matthew 13 covers both the third heaven, which is the abode of God and the angelic beings, and the first heaven, which is our atmospheric heaven. Scripture tells us that the first heaven is presently under the control of Satan: he is the "prince of the power of the air." But because God is sovereign over all His creation, we find a mixture of the divine and the satanic in the first heaven. This intermingling of "good and evil" will continue until our Lord returns at the end of the age and institutes His rule of righteousness over the whole earth.

There are three verses in Matthew 13 which reveal, in summary form, the teaching of Christ in this chapter. Verse 11 reads, *"He answered and said unto them, Because it is*

given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it is not given." Christ was telling His disciples why He was teaching the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens in parables. Our Lord wanted His own to understand the things concerning the kingdom which pertain to their service and life for Him. But to outsiders, those who had not received Jesus as Christ in simple faith, the mysteries were to remain hidden.

Verses 34 and 35 underscore what verse 11 said:

"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."

The previous chapter, Matthew 12, provides the setting for this chapter on the mysteries of the kingdom. Chapter 12 reveals that the leaders of Israel had crossed the "point of no return" in regard to the identity of the Lord Jesus. In the face of clear evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of Israel, these leaders had refused the proffered kingdom by deliberately discrediting all the credentials of the King. They attributed His supernatural power (which they could not deny) to Beelzebub, the prince of demons. And in so doing they committed the sin against the Holy Spirit for which there could be no forgiveness, either in that age (the age of the law) or the age to come (this age of grace).

After the offer of the earthly kingdom was rejected by the Jews and the Lord Jesus was likewise rejected, Christ became the "Revealer of Secrets." In this role He showed to His disciples what was to take place after Israel's rejection of the kingdom and His postponement of His literal earthly reign.

The opening verses of Matthew 13 make it evident that Christ is both the Rejected One and the "Revealer of Secrets." *"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside."* Verse 1. Although this verse records a literal historical event, it is also filled with symbolic meaning. The "house" represents Israel. "Leaving the house" indicates that Christ has severed His special relationship with Israel after she rejected Him. The "sea" typifies the Gentile nations of the world. "Taking His place by the sea" shows that our Lord's ministry was to cover a wider sphere. The mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens were about to be revealed; and the mysteries do not concern the destiny of only the nation of Israel, but rather they are related to all the nations.

"And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore." Verse 2. The Lord took a position that physically separated Him from the multitude. In chapters 1-12 of Matthew, our Lord moved in the midst of the multitudes. But in this scene He entered into a boat and took His place alone, separated from the people that He was teaching. The multitudes were standing on the seashore, but He was seated alone in the boat near the shore.

The picture typifies this present age. The Lord Jesus Christ has completed His work of the cross and has gone to His Father's house, to heaven. There He is seated at the right hand of the Father, as our Advocate. He is seated because His great work of the One Perfect Sacrifice is complete. But His people's work for Him is not complete; therefore they are still "standing."

II

The Mystery of the Sower

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Matt. 13:3-9.

Although the Lord did not begin His first parable with the expression "The kingdom of the heavens is like unto the sower going forth to sow," He did use this expression repeatedly later. What did He mean by this phrase? First it is evident that the Lord does not and cannot mean the literal earthly kingdom that was revealed to Israel in the Old Testament. That kingdom had been offered to the nation during the earlier part of the Lord's ministry and had just been rejected by the Jewish leaders in Matthew 12. The earlier message, "The kingdom of the heavens is at hand, repent," is not to be found in the remainder of Matthew's Gospel.

Some have believed that the expression "the kingdom of the heavens" refers to the church of this age — the mystical bride, body and building of Christ. But the expression does

not and could not refer exclusively to the church. What our Lord meant by this expression is simple and obvious. The earthly kingdom had been presented to Israel, but when the Jews rejected the King, they also rejected the kingdom. Therefore that kingdom was postponed.

This first parable says that the sower "went out." This indicates that he walked away from the "house" and "went out" into the field. The "field" is a type of the world; this symbol is later defined by the Lord Himself. So "the kingdom of the heavens" is that sphere of relationship to God that is extended to all people of the world and in which the name of Christ is confessed.

The kingdom of the heavens includes both those who are truly the Lord's and those who make merely an outward profession yet have never received Him in their hearts. Thus it pertains to all that goes under the name of Christianity. It includes the unsaved professors within the organized churches and also the members of the cults that masquerade under the name of Christianity yet deny the Lord's person and work.

There are two very interesting things that stand out in the opening sentence of this parable. *"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, the sower went forth to sow."* Verse 3. First, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of the sower, not a sower. The original Greek contains the definite article "the." The second thing to notice is that the sower "went out." That is, he went out of the house and into the field. This indicates the change in His ministry from the nation of Israel to those who are His own.

It is not difficult to determine who the sower is. In the Lord's explanation of the second parable, He says, "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man." Verse 37. It is important to realize that the symbols that the Lord uses do

not change from parable to parable. If the sower of the second parable is the Son of man, then so is the sower of the first parable. What He sows is the wheat, and throughout the Scripture wheat stands for purity, for truth, for the Word of God. He goes forth from the house (the nation Israel) into the field (the world). The Lord sows the good seed, some of which sprout into the sons of the kingdom.

The Lord sows the precious seed of His Word, which He Himself is. He had told His disciples that He was the "corn of wheat" which must "fall into the ground and die" in order that He can be the One who "bringeth forth much fruit." John 12:24. In the ground that seed dies, and out of death comes the fruit.

In the primary application this parable applies to the time of our Lord's earthly ministry. But in the wider application it must be taken as a picture of the entire age in which He is absent from the earth, when the kingdom of the heavens has been left in the hands of men. The sowing that was started by our Lord Jesus Christ still continues today through those who are called to preach His Word.

The sower has "gone out" to sow. Those who sow seeds normally sow them in the field. In verse 38 the Lord says, "The field is the world." So this reveals that "the sower" (the Lord Jesus Christ) has "gone forth" from the "house" (Israel) to sow the "good seed" of His Word in the "field" (the world). Here the fact is established that after Israel's final rejection of Messiah and the kingdom offered by Him, the Word of the Gospel is to go forth into all the world beginning "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8.

The rest of this parable concerns the result of the sowing of the seed of God's Word. The Lord's emphasis in this parable is placed on what will become of the seed that He, the

sower, sows. This includes both the seed that He sowed personally during His earthly ministry and the seed that continues to be sown by His followers.

The Lord's first parable certainly doesn't teach an eventual world conversion. This parable is positive proof that there will never be a universal acceptance of the Word of God. At most, only a small fraction of the seed sown will result in the sprouting of a plant which will grow to fruitful maturity. This parable shows that during this age, while our Lord is away in heaven and His Word is being preached and His grace offered, that in most cases, the Gospel will be rejected. Only a small part of God's Word finds fertile soil, sprouts, grows to maturity, and yields fruit. The remainder is rejected.

After the Lord had dismissed the multitudes and was alone with His disciples, they asked, "Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?" The disciples were puzzled at this new method of teaching because it represented a change from what they had heard previously. He had spoken clearly and literally to the multitudes of Israel. But now for the first time He spoke in parables, and they were unable to understand His meaning.

The answer that the Lord gave to this question is extremely important, for in it He not only infers a change in His purpose and ministry but also subtly pronounces a judgment on the nation that had rejected Him. *"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you (the disciples, His own) to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them (the unbelievers of that chosen nation) it is not given."* Matt. 13:11. The disciples, who represent believers, were to understand the previously unrevealed plan of God for this age. But the nation that had refused her Messiah would (as a nation) be in darkness "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Luke 21:24. *"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but*

whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." Matt. 13:12.

The Lord continued, *"Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias (Isaiah), which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."* Matt. 13:13-15. Our Lord quoted this passage from Isaiah 6:9-10. Isaiah received these words in a vision in which he saw God sitting upon a throne. The One who spoke these words to Isaiah was none other than the One who quoted these words here in Matthew 13:13-15, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Parable of the Sower Explained

After our Lord explained to the disciples their special place in the sight of God, and their blessing in being permitted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, He directed their attention to the meaning of the first parable. Four kinds of hearers are represented by the four kinds of soil. The Lord defined these hearers and then explained what happens to the seed of the Word that falls upon the various hearers.

"Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth

for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Matt. 13:18-23.

In the parable itself the Lord had said, "And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up." In the explanation He said, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side." The "way side" hearer represents those who receive the Word but have no understanding of it. However, it should be noted that the lack of understanding is not a question of insufficient mental capacity or of a lack of intellectual ability. The Lord says that the Word was sown "in his heart."

In Scripture the "heart" refers to the very seat of understanding and consciousness. The Word had penetrated to the conscience, and it could be either accepted or rejected. But the heart would not accept the Word, and the way side hearer turned against it. The Lord's expression "does not understand it" shows active opposition on the part of the hearer. In other words, "He would not understand it."

No sooner had the seed fallen on this hard way side than, according to the parable, "the fowls came and devoured them up." In His explanation the Lord said, "Then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." So here the Lord defined another symbol. The "fowls" represent Satan and his demon army — the powers of

darkness. It is extremely important to remember this when one comes to the parable of the mustard seed. Remember, the Lord is consistent in His usage of symbols.

The Lord continued, *"Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away."* In the explanation He said, *"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet he hath not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."*

The "rocky ground" is a rocky undersurface that is thinly covered with a layer of soil. When seed fall into the thin layer of soil they are able to sprout quickly. The "rocky ground" represents those who receive the Word with a sudden enthusiastic response which is nothing more than an emotional reaction. The appearance, as outwardly observed, is that the Word has taken root. It appears that the hearer has received the Lord Jesus Christ in his heart and has experienced the new birth. But the truth is, the seed is only rooted in the outward emotions. The "stony place" hearer reacts emotionally to the Gospel, but he does not inwardly accept the fact that he is a sinner and therefore does not place his entire trust in the only One who can help him — the Lord Jesus Christ. So there is no true conversion.

The Lord described a third class of hearers: *"And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them."* For His explanation the Lord said, *"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."*

The third class of hearer is represented by a potentially

productive soil in which thorns and weeds grow unchecked. In this soil the seed does sprout and springs up into a plant but the thorns and weeds prevent the young plant from receiving adequate light from the sun and water and nutrients from the soil. So the young plant cannot grow to maturity, and it cannot produce fruit. Life is there, but it is an unproductive life.

Many are represented by this class of hearers. They are truly touched by the Gospel message and realize their need of the Saviour, and in faith they put their trust in Christ. They are spiritually reborn — spiritual life springs up. They are truly young plants located among the thorns.

This third class of hearer is the carnal Christian, the one who is so caught up in the things of the world that his spiritual life does not grow and become fruitful. He is a part of that class of Christians to whom the Apostle Paul addressed the words of I Corinthians 3:1: *"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ."* This hearer is destined to stay carnal because he will not separate himself from the things of the world.

In these first three classes, the devil, the flesh, and the world are represented. The devil snatches up and devours the seed from the way side. The flesh attempts and fails in the stony ground. And the world surrounds and chokes the things of God in the carnal Christian life where the things of the world are not judged.

The fourth class of hearer needs no explanation. These hearers receive the Word and go on to maturity in the Christian life. They bear fruit according to the abilities that the Lord gives. *"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."*

The Mystery of the Wheat and the Tares

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." Matt. 13:24-30.

This second parable is definitely stated to be a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens. Our Lord was picturing a state of things in which true believers and false professors will be found together. True believers result from the sprouting of the good seed that fell upon the fertile ground. The false professors result from the sowing of the evil seed by the enemy, Satan. This counterfeits the true seed. The "tares" of the parable resemble wheat at all stages of growth except for the grain produced at the time of maturity.

The seed of the evil one was mingled with the good Word of the sower. Satan's "evil seed" results in counterfeit Chris-

tianity, in cultic religious beliefs which are sufficiently close to true Christianity to fool great multitudes. Yet these doctrines do not produce true life. There is no salvation apart from the Word of God.

The growth of the "tares" is not confined to those cults outside the mainstream of Christianity. Throughout the history of the church there have been those only too ready to deny that salvation is through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The idea of salvation through the administration of the so-called sacraments of the organized earthly church soon became a part of professing Christendom. The teaching of salvation by works, church ordinances or church membership are all the work of the tare seed sower.

Many wonder why the great masses of tares have been allowed to grow and dominate the sphere of Christendom as they do today. The answer to this puzzle is given here. When the servants of the householder came asking whether they should root up the tares, the answer was negative. The householder told his servants that the great separation will not occur until the time of the harvest. And the reason given is "Lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares Explained

"Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world (age); and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send

forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Matt. 13:36-43.

In His explanation of the parable, the Lord Jesus Christ defined all the symbols used. "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one."

The sower, the Son of man, the Lord Jesus Christ, sows the good seed of the Word of God in the field, which is the world. "The good seed are the children (sons) of the kingdom." The Lord's explanation of this symbol can only mean one thing. The seeds of the Word find good soil in the field. The seeds take root, and they spring up into spiritual life. Therefore the good seed sprouted in good soil are "the sons of the kingdom." The "sons of the kingdom" represent true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. These grains of wheat grow and produce fruit.

The major thrust of this parable is the enemy and his evil work, not the character of sown wheat. So here are the results of the two acts of sowing. Those who hear, believe and accept the true Gospel message are the wheat, the "sons of the kingdom." The tares are those who do not accept the true Gospel message but rather accept "another gospel," a counterfeit of Satan, and pose as true Christians.

The presence of Satan's tares explains why there are so many evil things and false teachings done in the name of Christianity. That is why cults spring up, and often such cults have a missionary zeal that strongly rivals that of the true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan is able to strongly motivate those who are his!

Just what is the nature of this counterfeit seed that is sown by the devil? It most generally takes the form of denials. One finds among the counterfeit doctrines that are often taught in the name of Christ such things as the denial of the true deity of our Lord. One also finds a denial of His finished work on the cross; the denial of His bodily resurrection; the denial of the full, verbal inspiration of the Bible; the denial of salvation by pure grace without works and replacing salvation by grace with the idea of salvation by the works of man's hands.

It is with ever increasing intensity that the tare seed continues to spread and fill the field. Whenever and wherever the truth is taught; that is, whenever and wherever the good seed of the Word is sown, it is not long before the enemy sends his servants with the counterfeit. This has been one of the major ways in which Satan has diluted and neutralized the spread of the Gospel during this age. Wherever the Gospel seed is sown, the devil brings a counterfeit of Christian doctrine; a counterfeit which, to natural man, looks very much like true Christianity. Yet it always denies those basic tenets which are necessary for the salvation of the lost sinner.

There is one major lesson that stands out from this parable of the wheat and the tares. The character of this age of grace in which we live is evil, and the tendency is to be toward increasing evil as the age moves on toward completion. Satan is still the "god of this age." The mixed condition of the wheat and the tares, the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one, will continue to the end of the age.

The householder did not delegate the authority to root up and destroy the tares to his servants for the simple reason that they might make the fatal mistake of rooting up the good in order to destroy the bad. But at the end of this age — not the end of the world but rather the end of the age — "the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather

out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire." The Lord Jesus Christ has delegated the task of separating the tares out from the wheat to the angels of heaven. "The harvest is the end of the world (age); and the reapers are the angels."

It is not only an idle dream, it is actually contrary to the command of our Lord to hope to reform all of professing Christendom during this age. We are not going to eliminate false doctrine from Christendom. We are simply told to separate ourselves from those groups and organizations that preach and teach non-scriptural doctrine. The scriptural rule of our day is not ecumenicalism but, rather, separatism. The wheat and the tares are going to grow together in the field until the end of the age.

Note most carefully where the wheat and the tares are to grow together. The Lord said that they are to grow together in the field. And He said, "The field is the world." He did not say that the wheat and the tares were to grow together in the local assembly, the local church. Now it is true that Christians cannot see into the hearts of those who profess the name of Christ and therefore cannot pass judgment as to an individual's personal standing before the Lord. But it is also true that Christians are commanded to judge the conduct of those who profess the name of Christ. When that conduct falls short of New Testament standards, and if that conduct is not corrected when approached in a scriptural manner, then such individuals are to be purged from the local assembly.

The "end of the age" that our Lord referred to in His explanation coincides in time with the later question of the disciples when they asked Christ, "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?" Matt. 24:3. The Lord's answer to that question shows that His appearing in the clouds and the rapture of the

church is not the completion of this age. Since the Lord responded to the disciples' question by describing the great tribulation and His own coming to set up His earthly kingdom, we can see that the end of this age will come at the close of the tribulation. This will come at the end of Daniel's 70th week, concluding the great prophecy concerning God's earthly people, the Jews.

The Lord made it clear that the angels of heaven are to be the harvesters. When the crop of the field (the world) reaches maturity at the end of the age, angels will be sent to accomplish the harvest. This corresponds exactly to what the Apostle John described in Revelation 14:14-15. *"And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe."*

The harvest in view here has nothing to do with the true church, the bride and body of Christ. The church will have already been taken home to the Father's house at least seven years before the end of the age. That portion of the wheat of the field that is the church will have already been gathered out of the field as the "firstfruit."

When the Lord spoke of the bundling of the tares and the gathering of the wheat into the granary, He was not speaking of the time of His appearing to take His bride (the church) home to His Father's house in heaven. The "wheat" that is in the field at that time is not the church; it is the remnant of Israel and those that are saved during the tribulation. The Lord did not reveal the destiny of the church in this parable because it was not His purpose. The full revelation of the great expectation that belongs to the church came through the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John.

After the church is removed from the earth and before the end of the age, there will again be wheat growing in the field of the earth. There will be a great deal of "sowing" during the tribulation, and the "good seed" which takes root in "good soil" will sprout and mature rapidly. The "good seed" will bear fruit, "some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." The "good seed of the sons of the kingdom" that come out of the tribulation will have "washed their robes . . . in the blood of the Lamb." See Revelation 7:14. These are the "good seed" that are to be gathered into the "barn" at the harvest at the end of this age.

The "barn" represents the millennial kingdom of our Lord, that righteous age to come. The "sons of the kingdom" are the seed of the righteous kingdom to be established in this earth. And our Lord said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matt. 13:43.

There are three great facts taught in this parable of the wheat and the tares. First, the enemy (the devil) began his evil work of sowing the seed of false doctrine at the very beginning of this age. Secondly, this age is mixed; good and bad grow together in the field of the world. This condition is not to be changed until the "harvest" at the end of the age. But thirdly, the mixed condition will most definitely cease at the completion of the age. The "sons of the kingdom" will inherit the literal millennial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is to be set up here on this earth. The tares are to be bundled together and are to be cast out into a place of fire. "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

IV

The Mystery of the Grain of Mustard Seed

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Matt. 13:31-32.

In this third parable of Matthew 13, the Lord presents another picture of the kingdom of the heavens which is designed to further reveal the mysteries of that kingdom. Actually, this parable and the parable of the leavened loaf which follows belong together since they both present a similar picture, but from a slightly different aspect.

Sadly, both of these parables have been grossly misinterpreted. In fact, exactly the opposite of what the Lord meant has been taught by much of professing Christianity. Many assumed that the Lord had the true church in view when He spoke of "the kingdom of the heavens," and this error has led to improper interpretation of the parables.

If one assumes that the "kingdom of the heavens" is a synonym for the church and then he reads that it is likened unto a little mustard seed which becomes a great tree that shelters the birds of the air, he is going to interpret the parable as a picture of the growth of true Christianity within the world. Similarly, if he reads that the kingdom of the heavens can be pictured by a measure of meal in which a woman

hides a small lump of leaven and the leaven then grows to permeate the entire measure, then he is also going to assume that the Lord is describing the growth of true Christianity which is to result in the eventual conversion of the entire world. These interpretations are not only wrong, but they assign a meaning to the likenesses that are precisely the opposite of what the Lord meant.

The first four parables were delivered to the crowds which had gathered to hear Christ teach. He did not provide an interpretation of any of the parables before the multitudes, but later in private He did expound the first two parables to His disciples. However, the remainder of the parables were left unexplained. They were to be interpreted by the believing hearer as the Holy Spirit illuminates and reveals the meaning to those who are His own.

In this parable, the Lord provides a picture of the kingdom of the heavens as it grows and expands in the earth. But the expansion is in an unnatural way! The Lord likened the thing that He left in the earth to a tiny grain of mustard seed, which, in its normal growth pattern, is "the greatest among herbs." A mustard seed normally produces an herb. It is not expected to grow into a tree! So as the mustard seed takes root in the earth it unnaturally expands beyond the herb stage into a great tree. And as it becomes a tree of great proportions, it also becomes the roosting place of the "birds of the air."

The Lord was definitely not providing a picture of the true church when He described this small grain of mustard seed and the mutational growth of the plant into a mighty tree. If He intended to picture the true church here under the title of "the kingdom of the heavens," then this parable stands in contradiction to what He taught elsewhere. The mission and future of the church is never hinted to be that of a great "tree" that overshadows the earth. The overshadow-

ing tree is a symbol of great political power. It is the very symbol that God used to picture the great emperor Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4.

The grain of mustard seed was planted in the field. Remember, the Lord defines the "field" as the world. The mustard seed sprouted and rooted in itself in the field (world). As it began its mutational growth, it rooted deeper and deeper in the earth. The root system expanded in an unnatural way just as did the growth above the ground. The upper portion of the plant expanded to great size, and the branches afforded shelter, comfort and protection for the "birds of the air." Here we have something entirely different from the true church. The parable pictures a system which definitely is rooted in the earth and which aims at greatness and power in and over the earth itself!

During this age the true church is rejected and disowned by the world just as Christ was rejected and disowned by the world. It is not the destiny of the church to "overshadow the earth," to rule and to reign, during this age. The calling and destiny of the church is not earthly but heavenly. Her mission is to shine out with the glorious light of the Lord Jesus Christ and to testify of His grace, not to control and overspread the world.

The man of this parable is the same as the man (the sower and the householder) of the first two parables. So the grain of mustard seed which was brought by the Son of man during His earthly ministry develops into an unnatural thing when left in the hands of men. That is exactly what a mustard tree would be! This unnatural thing is professing Christendom as a system of the world. Although there is something way down in the heart of the tree that is true (the true church, the body of Christ, is contained within this monstrosity), for the most part it is something that professes the name of Christ but actually has neither Him nor His Spirit!

The Lord said that the "birds of the air" will find shelter in the branches of the mustard tree. The "birds" which devoured the seed that fell by the way side were identified by the Lord as the instruments of Satan. This identification of "birds" is consistent throughout Scripture. So the fallen angels of the kingdom of Satan are actually able to find shelter among the branches of this monstrous tree that grew from what the Son of man brought to earth! The Lord's picture accurately portrays the growth of professing Christendom as it is seen in the world today. Soon this tree will be full grown. Revelation 18:2 says that Babylon will become the habitation of demons and every unclean bird.

V

The Mystery of the Leavened Loaf

"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of the heavens is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." Matt. 13:33.

The parable of the leaven in the meal is very brief, and it is contained entirely within one verse of Scripture. In times past many Bible expositors have incorrectly identified the woman of this parable as the true church. These expositors have identified "the three measures of meal" as the world and the "leaven" as the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If these identifications were correct, then this parable teaches that as a result of the workings of the "leaven" of the Gospel, the whole world will be "Christianized" eventually.

But this stands in direct contradiction to what has been taught in the preceding three parables. The symbols in this parable cannot represent the church, the world and the Gospel, respectively. Therefore the symbols must be correctly identified before we can properly understand the parable.

First consider the symbol of the leaven. No Jew of that day or this day would ever dream that leaven could possibly represent something that is good. Leaven to the Jew meant something evil.

Leaven was not permitted to be included in any offering to the Lord made by fire. The Orthodox Jew was required by

God's law to conscientiously search every nook and cranny of his dwelling before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, to make certain that absolutely no leaven was hidden anywhere. It was necessary that the Jew purge out every trace of leaven from the premises before the feast began, or else he stood in violation of God's law. In both Old and New Testament Scripture the symbol "leaven" never stands for anything good. It always stands for evil and corruption.

What does the symbol of the "three measures of meal" represent? Meal (or flour) is ground grain — ground wheat. It is the product of the "good seed," the "sons of the kingdom." Tares never yield fine wholesome meal that can nourish and sustain life. Meal is the product of the "good seed" only. Therefore it would not be consistent with the rest of Scripture to assume that the "three measures of meal" represents the mass of unregenerated humanity of the world.

Scripture is not silent as to the true meaning of the "three measures of meal." The "three measures of meal" stand, in type, for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He told His disciples that He was the "corn of wheat" that must fall to the ground and die in order that He might bring forth fruit. He also said, "I am the Bread of Life."

The "three measures of meal" are a type of both the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In His person He is good, pure, holy, undefiled; and the "three measures of fine meal" represent those qualities. His work and His Word are also good, pure, holy and undefiled. Just as leaven cannot possibly mean something good, the three measures of meal cannot possibly mean something bad. This symbol always denotes purity.

"The kingdom of the heavens is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." If the leaven of this parable were the

Gospel and the three measures of meal were the mass of unregenerated humanity (as so many have erroneously claimed), then the parable would teach that it is only necessary to introduce the Gospel to the world, and the Gospel will work by itself to eventually permeate all of humanity.

If we were to believe that the Gospel is leaven and that this "leaven" is intended to work (as leaven does) by itself to permeate the whole lump, then this means the "Gospel leaven" is a total failure. There is no single community of people anywhere - much less a whole world - that has ever been successfully "leavened" by the Gospel.

Now it is easy to see the true meaning of this fourth parable. Leaven represents false doctrine, evil, corruption. The good, pure three measures of meal stands for truth, for the Lord Jesus Christ, His work and His Word. The leaven is inserted into the meal and, working as leaven does, it corrupts the meal. It changes that which was good. This process continues to work and, given sufficient time, it will permeate the whole mass.

The picture is a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens, and it correlates exactly with the other parables. The Lord's parable predicts how evil doctrine will corrupt the fine meal, the true doctrine of Christ's person and work, as time goes on during His personal absence. This parable follows the teaching of the parable of the mustard seed. First, the professing church was lifted up into prominence — it began to grow into a great tree. The next step was the woman who put leaven into the "three measures of meal."

In the book of Revelation this "woman" is called "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." The church of the Middle Ages carried the Babylonian "Queen of Heaven" into the kingdom of the heavens, and that apostate church named her "the virgin Mary, the Mother of God"!

Thus the evil leaven of paganism - Babylonianism - was introduced into the fine meal of the doctrine of Christ. Now this "leaven" works throughout a major part of professing Christendom. When the true church is removed from the earth, the leaven-process will go on to completion. Only the heat of a baking oven will stop the working of leaven, and the fires of God's judgment will stop this leaven "at the time of the harvest."

VI

The Mysteries of the Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price

“Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” Matt. 13:44-46.

The last three of the parables of the kingdom of the heavens were spoken only to the disciples. The parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl belong together since they present companion truths. They touch on God’s purpose and His goals for this age in which we live. The treasure and the pearl are two things that God finds of value in this conglomeration that is “the kingdom of the heavens.”

In both parables a man is mentioned, and this man sells all that he has in order to obtain the things that he esteems as precious. In the first parable he finds a treasure in the field, and he hides it there while he buys the field in order to possess the treasure. In the second parable the man sells all that he has in order to obtain the one pearl that has such great value.

There are some striking differences in these companion parables. The treasure is in the field, and after its discovery it is hidden within the field. The field is bought; and when the man has obtained possession of the field, he also owns the

treasure. The pearl of great value is something that comes out of the sea. Since the emphasis is on the great value of the pearl, we might assume that it has greater value than the treasure. In fact, it is not even stated that the treasure has great value, but the man did sell all that he had to obtain possession of the field containing the treasure. A "treasure" can be added to or diminished without changing its identity as a treasure. However, in contrast with this, the pearl is complete. Its value, size and beauty are fixed.

According to the common view, the man who sells all to obtain the treasure as well as the merchant man who sells all to obtain the pearl of great value is the unsaved sinner! This interpretation makes both the treasure of the field and the pearl of great price stand for the Gospel — salvation — God's grace in receiving lost sinners. To many, this seems like a very proper interpretation of these companion parables. But such an interpretation directly contradicts the Gospel itself!

These two parables have inspired many so-called Gospel sermons in which the listening sinner is exhorted to give up all that he has in order to become a Christian. He is asked to surrender his claim on both the world and himself; and in so doing he will find the pearl of great price — the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not the Gospel message! It is the greatest possible distortion of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel says that the lost sinner has no sacrifice to bring. He must come as the well-known song says, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me." Self-sacrifice, self-denial, "trying to live right" — none of these can ever secure eternal life.

The Gospel of grace offers to every sinner eternal life without money and without price. It is a free gift to all who simply recognize their lost and undone condition and their need for God's grace and who receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

All "giving up" and surrender follows after a person is saved and has already received God's gift of eternal life. "Giving up" and surrender never come before salvation. After salvation the "giving up" comes through the power of God working in the changed heart of the saved one. The Lord never meant these parables to describe a seeking and finding that is done by the sinner.

If the man were the sinner and the treasure were the Gospel, then the sinner would have to buy the field in order to obtain the treasure — the Gospel. The parable says, "The kingdom of the heavens is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." What is the field? The Lord is consistent in His usage of symbols. Once a symbol has been defined in one parable, that definition is also valid for the same symbol wherever it appears in the other parables of this series. The meaning of this symbol was given by the Lord Himself, "The field is the world." Verse 38.

If the man who buys the field is the sinner, then this parable teaches he would have to buy the whole world in order to obtain the treasure. If the treasure is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, then this parable teaches that it is necessary for the sinner to buy the whole world in order to receive Christ! That just does not make sense! The man is not the sinner; the treasure is not the Gospel!

Who is the man of the parable of the treasure and the merchant man of the parable of the pearl? Recall that in the first two parables of this series a person was mentioned. This person was the sower, the man who sowed the good seed. This man was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

In these two parables that are now under consideration, the man and the merchant man stand for this same person who was the sower of the first two parables. Our Lord Jesus

Christ Himself is the man who bought the field and the treasure in it and the merchant man who sold all to obtain one pearl of great value. The Saviour pays the great price and purchases (that is, buys back, redeems) the field (the world), thus purchasing or redeeming the treasure that is in it. And the Saviour gives up all in order to possess one pearl of great value.

Both parables teach the same great truth with respect to the One "who selleth all that He hath." The Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and save that which was lost and has purchased the field with His blood, and He has found in it a treasure which is now His. As a companion truth, He has also given up all to obtain one pearl of great value.

We might ask, "Why is it necessary to have two parables?" If the man that finds and the merchant man that seeks are the same, why should His work in giving up all be mentioned twice? Why is a treasure mentioned first and then a pearl? And why is the purchased treasure hid while the one pearl of great value evidently comes first into possession of the merchant man?

Here is the very heart of the teachings of these seven parables of the kingdom of the heavens. In these two parables the Lord speaks of the two fold mystery that is God's purpose and goal of this age. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the two different objects which He obtained by His work of redemption. When He mentioned the treasure hid in the field (His purchase), He was referring to His earthly people, Israel. When He spoke of the one pearl of great value, He was referring to His heavenly people, the church.

Israel is the treasure in the field. God's own words tell us so. Exodus 19:5 reads in part, "Ye shall be a peculiar (particular) treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine." Psalm 135:4 says, "*For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.*" And again,

in Malachi 3:17 God says, *"And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."*

When the Lord Jesus Christ came from heaven, He found His people after the flesh, His chosen nation, in the "field" (the world). Verse 38. He bought the whole world with His blood which He poured out at Calvary. And with His purchase of the world, He obtained with it the chosen people that are His earthly treasure. Caiaphas, the high priest at the time of the Lord's crucifixion, was certainly not a disciple of the Lord. Nevertheless the Apostle John (writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) testified that this man who held the high priest's office spoke prophetically of the Lord's purchase of Israel. John said of Caiaphas, "He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation." John 11:51.

The parable says that the man purchased the field and thus became the owner of the hidden treasure. But it does not say that he got possession of the treasure. In fact, the implication in the parable is that the treasure of the field is still hidden there.

Israel is the Lord's peculiar treasure. He has redeemed (bought back) the world with His blood, and with it He has redeemed His earthly people. But the Lord brought judgment on that nation that rejected Him, and since A.D. 70 the Jewish people have been dispersed over the world. The Lord found His "treasure" in the field, and He hid it in the field. But Israel is yet to be manifest as the Lord's peculiar treasure. This nation is to visibly exhibit to the world, in the coming millennial age, all the excellencies of the Lord Himself.

The Lord died for that nation, but this particular aspect of His death has not yet been made manifest. Israel is hidden in the field; that nation is the fig tree withered to the root by

the Lord's curse when He found her unfruitful. But the Lord will come again, He will return to the field once more. He is coming to claim that which is His. Then He will remove that treasure from its hiding place. He will claim His people Israel, and then they will rejoice in their salvation.

The Pearl of Great Price

But what about the companion mystery? What is the pearl of great price? The pearl is the church. In Ephesians 5:25 the Apostle Paul wrote that Christ "loved the church and gave Himself for it." Here in the parable of the pearl of great price, the Lord declares that same precious truth Himself.

One should take a careful look at this figure of the pearl. First, where do pearls come from? The pearl is taken out of the sea. And what does the "sea" typify over and over again in Scripture? The "sea" pictures the nations of the world, the restless mass of humanity that is tossed to and fro at the whim of the winds and tides. And what is the church? It is that body and bride of Christ that is called out of all nations as a separated and redeemed heavenly people.

A pearl is produced inside the shell of the oyster. The process by which the beautiful pearl is produced is familiar to most. A small grain of sand imbeds itself between the living organism and the shell. To relieve the pain and irritation from this cutting grain of sand, the oyster deposits a thin layer of brilliant material around it. As the oyster grows, the process of depositing a new covering of the brilliant material is repeated over and over again. When the shell is opened, a perfectly formed pearl is seen. The pearl contains all the colors of the rainbow beautifully blended together. It is a pearl of nameless value, a "pearl of great price."

Just like the pearl from the oyster, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ is one. The church is composed of many

countless members that are known to God alone. The pearl from the sea is composed of many countless layers. The church is from the wounded side of the Lord Himself; the pearl is from the wounded side of the oyster.

In the present day this pearl of great value is still forming from the wounded side of the Saviour. No one knows just how many more "layers" (members) are to be added to this pearl, the true church. No one knows how long it will be before the merchant man who "went and sold all that he had, and bought it" will come and take it.

When Christ comes to take possession of the field (the world) and the treasure (Israel) that is in it, His church (His one pearl) will be with Him. And this is the twofold mystery of "The kingdom of the heavens."

VII

The Mystery of the Dragnet

"Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world (age): the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Matt. 13:47-50.

The seventh and last parable serves as a proper ending for a picture of this age because it shows the termination of "the kingdom of the heavens." It depicts the harvest. The "dragnet" mentioned here is most definitely not the "net of the Gospel" as many have claimed. It is the harvest net of the angels as they drag it over the world at the time of the second coming of Christ. The "net" brings all nations to the earthly judgment seat of the King when He begins His reign. This time is described vividly in Matthew 25:31-32: *"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."*

After the pearl of great value is claimed by the heavenly Merchant Man, after the church is taken home to heaven by her Bridegroom, the end of this age begins. The "dragnet" is let into the "sea" which always represents the nations. The

“dragnet” brings forth both the good and the bad to the place where the final separation of the “wheat” and the “tares” is to take place. That place is the judgment seat of the King.

The Lord explained this parable in these words: *“So shall it be at the end of the world (age): the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”* Verses 49-50. The wicked will be cast into the furnace of fire, and the righteous shall enter the millennial kingdom of Christ. That’s our Lord’s picture of the soon-coming end of the age. *“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”*

VIII

The Mysteries Made Known

"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."
Matt. 13:34-35.

These seven parables present the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens. These revelations began with the Lord's first advent, and they show the conditions which prevail up until His bodily return to earth. It is highly significant that the last three of these parables (containing as they do the mystery of Israel, the mystery of the church, and the mystery of the end of the age) were spoken in private to our Lord's disciples only.

These parables were not presented before the great multitude because the truths revealed are not for the multitude. These truths are only for those who belong to Him because it is given only through the Spirit of God to know the intimate mysteries of the kingdom. *"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it is not given."* Verse 11.

The disciples had heard the seven parables along with the Lord's explanation of the first two. *"Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea,*

Lord." Verse 51. They indicated that they had understood these mysteries which the Lord Jesus Christ had just revealed to them in parables. But their subsequent actions make it evident that at that time they had, at best, only a feeble understanding of them. *"Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of the heavens is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."* Verse 52.

What did the Lord mean by this? To understand His meaning, one has to go back to verses 34 and 35. *"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."*

To the casual reader, it sounds as though the entire statement of verse 35 is a quotation from "the prophet." But is it? Matthew was quoting from the Maschil, or instruction, of the Prophet Asaph, and the quote is found in Psalm 78:2. When one looks at this Psalm, he finds that only "I will open my mouth in a parable" is a direct quote of the Old Testament. And then the Psalm goes on to review the works and promises of God with respect to the chosen nation Israel.

The Lord says that He "will utter things that have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." So, in Psalm 78, things that pertained to Old Testament prophecies were illuminated. That is the "old." But the Lord, the "Revealer of Secrets", provides the new mysteries of this age. In the form of parables, He has provided the new revelation.

These prophecies are something entirely different; they pertain to things that were not previously revealed. However, the new revelation of the mysteries of this age does not cancel the old. It adds to it. All prophecies are to be fulfilled.

So, the "scribes" (those who know the records) who are instructed, are able to place the two revelations together. Now any believer can understand the whole picture. He "bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

The End