

No. 1. FREE.

*"He said unto them, Know ye not this parable?  
and how then will ye know all parables? The  
Sower soweth the Word."—Mark 4. 13, 14.*

# THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS IN MATTHEW 13.

An outline study for those who  
acknowledge the full inspiration  
of Scripture, and humbly desire  
to please their Saviour and Lord.

*"Receive with meekness the engrafted Word."—  
James 1. 21.*

# PREFACE.

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**T**HE Parables, like the Types, are full of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having experienced and enjoyed a little of their inexhaustible fulness. I desire to share, with others of His beloved people, the food that He has graciously provided. A book on all the parables is in prayerful preparation, but this forerunner is herewith sent forth in faith, and dedicated to the Lord's service. It concerns the largest collection of parables spoken at one time, as recorded by the Holy Spirit for our instruction.

Our prayerful desire is that our Heavenly Father may use it to the edification of His children, and their definite separation from the world, and from the attractions of this age. The practical message of Matthew 13, with the unveiling of Satan's purpose, is deeply impressive. Worldliness can never please God—never.

Copies will be supplied as the Lord enables.

Suggestions and questions are ever welcome, for there is ever a fulness beyond all that any of us realize, and it should be our privilege and joy to learn more of our Lord Himself and of His words, while, in the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we await His return and pray expectantly, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

PERCY W. HEWARD.

# Some Preparatory Thoughts on the Parables Generally.

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“YE ought to remember the words of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20. 35) was the helpful testimony of Paul to the elders from Ephesus. At Nazareth the people “wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4. 22), yet soon rose up to thrust Him out of the city, and to become, in intention, His murderers. Grace was indeed poured over His lips (Ps. 45. 2), and well might the officers say, “Never man spake like This Man” (John 7. 46). The words of the Holy Spirit, through prophets and apostles, preserved in all Scriptures are equally inspired, but these holy men of God did not always experience this inspiration. Christ, on the other hand, spoke inerrantly at *all* times. Happy are we if unlike those at Nazareth, and, by contrast, like John the Baptist, we rejoice greatly because of the Bridegroom’s voice (John 3. 29). This joy is the mark of His sheep (John 10. 27), even as it is the characteristic of the Bride, for “His lips are like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh” (S. of S. 5. 13).

It is remarkable how many of the recorded utterances of the Lord Jesus are parabolic. This is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. On some occasions, “Without a parable spake He not unto them” (Matt. 13. 34). He Himself emphasized this aspect, “Therefore speak I to them in parables” (Matt. 13. 13). And we are told that this was in fulfilment of prophecy (Matt. 13. 35). It is important to ponder the reason. The disciples were contrasted with the multitude, because it was given to them to know “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” They were “within:” the parables were addressed to those “without” (Mark 4. 11). Accordingly when the Lord Jesus reproved His dear people for their “unwisdom,” with regard to their heavenly “generation” (Luke 16. 8) He used a parabolic mode of instruction even to them. It is evident that “mysteries” are only known to those who are brought “within” (cf. 1 Cor. 2. 7, 8, 15. 51; Col. 1. 26, 27, etc.), and that parables contain veiled instruction. Hence

we read, "Therefore speak I unto them in parables: because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." The Lord knew the condition of the nation, and was never deceived by the temporary and outward enthusiasm (cf. John 5. 35). The heart was gross, and there was an unpreparedness for the "healing" which only belongs to the broken in heart (Matt. 13. 15 with Ps. 147. 3). Hence these messages were only beautiful stories to those who were not humbled, and were given with the intention that only the wise might understand (Mark 4. 11, 12, see Dan. 12. 10; Hos. 14. 9). We think of the "very lovely song" of Ezekiel 33. 32, and the sad blindness of the people generally, though glad of heart that some were brought to experience a wondrous salvation.

We have seen that the Lord Jesus Himself uses the word "parable" which occurs 50 times, and is also rendered "comparison" or "figure" (Heb. 9. 9).<sup>\*</sup> The Holy Spirit, moreover, alludes to a type as "a parable with a view to the time now present," and thus we observe the close link between the types and parables. This is important. The one is usually in materials and actions, the other in words: thus *both* contain parallels *and contrasts*:—for every figure designedly falls short in showing for example, the glory of the Lord Jesus and His work. The Hebrew term is rendered "parable" 18 times, and "proverb" 19, for a proverb is often a condensed simile. The later Scriptures only once render "parable" in this way (Luke 4. 23), usually employing another term (John 16. 25, 29, 2 Pet. 2. 22), equally setting forth the opposite of speaking "plainly." We may therefore expect some things hard to be understood, and the Lord Jesus indicated that He would thus "utter things which have been kept secret" (Matt. 13. 35). It behoves us, therefore, to be reverently attentive and to seek God's gracious instruction as to the "things new and old," brought before our responsive hearts.

Such thoughts prepare us for a very important inference. Unless the Holy Spirit records the interpretation as with "the Sower" and "the tares," we must be careful not to use any parable to prove our opinion, instead of corroborating what has been revealed by God elsewhere. Many dear children of God

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<sup>\*</sup> We may hesitate as to the expression: "The parable of the unjust steward," for strong evidence is needed, when the Holy Spirit omits this word. Serious errors have been introduced through many assuming that we have "The parable of the rich man and Lazarus" in Luke 16. Satan would ever explain away Scripture.

have gone astray by building on types, in accord with their own ideas. The type was appointed perfectly, but we must not interpret, and say, "This is that," *unless we have Divine evidence*. In other words, parables and types, confirm, illustrate, amplify and impress, but, if we find no definite **Scriptural** clue, it may be we understand amiss. One realises the havoc through the so-called "spiritualising" of Scripture, and there are serious errors by human inferences of godly believers, e.g. regarding Enoch as a type of those said to be caught up before the tribulation, which they have wrongly linked with the flood, albeit the flood was not tribulation, but *wrath*. Many have thus been hindered in prayerful study of the prophetic Scriptures by these well-intended deductions. How vast, too, has been the superstructure of dangerous teaching founded on the theory that the gospel "leavens" the ruined world. It is so easy for us all to put *our interpretation* of a parable on a level with the words of God: may we be granted humility and discernment, lest His people be led astray. It is not with a sense of personal infallibility that these expositions are taken in hand, but with a desire for personal discipleship, and discipleship is always lowly, and the prayers of other disciples are a treasured possession, that our Father may not be dishonoured, nor the Holy Spirit grieved.

It is important to answer at once the common objection, "You must not press a point too far." It is often associated with a failure to realise the fulness of plenary inspiration. We venture to assert that when the Lord gives a parable, *every word has a meaning* whether we understand it or not; His own explanation in one case illustrates this fulness (Matt. 13. 37-41), and shows a helpful way of writing out others, with a column for the meaning (and another for parallel Scriptures as evidence). If Christ refers to the "joy" of the buyer in Matthew 13. 44, *there is a reason*\*: if He alters the language from "came down" in Luke 10. 31, to "as He journeyed" in 33 *there is a reason*†. If He changes from "which was lost" in Luke 15. 6, to "which I had lost" in 9, there is a reason‡. Every sentence, every word, every order, every tense will contribute its blessing. If the Lord wished to omit anything (e.g. "the fold" in Luke 15. 4) the omission is spiritually helpful: the silence as to any buying in Matthew 25. 11, is full of in-

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\* Note Hebrews 12. 2.

† The Good Samaritan was not going down "by chance."

‡ No blame attaches to The Shepherd.

struction, the final view is "they went to buy." One there is Who if He goes *to do* a work goes *and does it* (John 14. 2, 3), but this cannot be said of all.

Such examples might be multiplied but the last enforces a very precious point. The parables have a solemnising, and refreshing practical *message*. Though they veil truth from the unready, they impress it on the disciple, and are full of blessing as to the person of the Lord Jesus and His work, and as to the accountability of sinners who make light of God's message (Matt. 22. 5), and the responsibility of believers to occupy till their Lord comes. These are not only narratives of beauty. They appeal to the heart, and bring before God's beloved people His gracious messages for their deep heart-searching, and only as we have the application, by the Holy Spirit, in our daily life, can we truly profit. The words of God are not given to make us clever, but lovingly obedient, and we shall find parable after parable to make us grateful for grace to the graceless, and, awakening praise, to summon to love's devotedness even though the words are not added as in Luke 10. 37, "Go and do thou likewise." Let it be repeated that the ruin of man, the redemption of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the path of the believer and the coming again of our Lord will alike be before us, and in a deeply practical setting, that all our studies may bring forth fruit both now, and in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, and may we not hope that some reader will, through these meditations see, by faith, for the first time, "the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world," and realise the joy of the gift of eternal life by His finished work?

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## The Parables of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 13.

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THE Lord Jesus sometimes spoke one parable by itself, as far as we know, but usually two or more (e.g. Luke 5. 36-39, 13. 18-21). The "threefoldness" of Luke 14 is before us, and the three "panels" and threefold finding, in chapter 15. As the Book of Psalms contains parallel lines in the majority of verses, so the parabolic teaching of Christ is normally arranged that we may compare the parables with one another, and mark the appointed *contrasts* as well. We have seen that the Book of Proverbs bears the very name "Parables," and do we not find the same twofoldness in most verses there?

But Matthew 13 has a yet fuller structure, and, though the Lord uttered parables before this (Matt. 9. 14-17, 12. 29), He Himself laid a great stress on the understanding of the Sower. "Know ye not this parable? And how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark 4. 13). Furthermore, it is in this context that He was pleased to explain most plainly why He thus spoke, and to give the (unusual) explanation of two parables as a key to other passages also. Moreover, two of these precious similitudes, at least, were uttered for emphasis on another occasion also (The Mustard Seed and The Leaven). It seems therefore that we may humbly expect God's gracious help in parabolic interpretation if we take this chapter *first*; nor shall our faith be disappointed.

The setting is impressive. The Lord Jesus turned from "this wicked generation" in chapter 12. 45, and emphasized the new relationship of those who did the will of the Father (12. 50), even as He led up to the new order of scribes in 13. 52. There is thus a putting aside of mere Judaism, and we are not surprised to find His own description, "the mysteries of the *kingdom of heaven*" (13. 11). Mysteries are not mysterious to all, but only opened to those who have opened hearts and eyes. May we be such! The "kingdom of heaven," or more literally "of the heavens," is not mentioned in any other book. It is observable that Matthew's gospel alone refers to the "church" by name. The fact that the Holy Spirit uses "the kingdom of God" in a retrospective passage as Matthew 21. 43 reminds us that "the kingdom of the heavens" involved a fresh status, and was viewed as future in Matthew 3. 2, 4. 17. When we realise that the Sower evidently is the Lord Jesus personally, in

both the first two parables (Matt. 13. 37, see Mark 4. 14), we regret the omission by our translation of the definite article in verse 3, "Behold *the* Sower went forth (or came out, John 16. 28) to sow." Not only does this set forth His pre-eminence throughout the parables, but we have His own description of His earthly ministry. And inasmuch as "the kingdom of the heavens" tells of a heavenly calling, based on His atonement, it is fitting that in the first passage we do not read "the kingdom of the heavens is like," albeit we have the "word of the kingdom" (19). It is not till the second parable that we find the kingdom of the heavens inaugurated, and there the field has been purchased and the word "His" bears this testimony. So exact is the language of the Holy Spirit. Nor is it the exactness of strained effort, but of perfect wisdom.

The Lord Jesus was the Sower. How He delighted in the *word*. In ministry, amid temptations, when raised from the dead, He ever laid stress on *the word*. Alas, that men seek to introduce something else. *The Word*, and *the Word only*, is to be sown. "They have Moses and the prophets." And Paul could testify thus, "saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26. 22). The human heart craves for novelty, excitement, and amusement, but we would preach Christ crucified. He is altogether worthy. The excellence of the message, and the perfection of the Preacher, did not mean that all received. The human heart is not changed by hearing the proclamation, any more than by the holy government of Christ's kingdom (Rev. 20. 8). How we need to look upward, and, while we feel our need, refuse to be discouraged, laying hold of the precious promise that "a seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation" (Ps. 22. 30). And thus, in the fourfold ground (suggesting, it may be, the parallel world-wide condition), there is *one* soil that is "good." The ploughed ground, the prepared ground, welcomes the seed aright. Christ *shall* see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied (Isa. 53. 11).

But it is observable that, in every case, attitude to *the word* both at the time of hearing and afterwards, is brought before us. The wayside hearer does not understand *the word*, the rocky ground hearer receives it with joy, but in the absence of a living root and of the continued moisture of inner fellowship with God, receives in vain. That which brings out the failure is "tribulation or persecution . . . because of *the word*" (cf. John 17. 14). The thorny ground shows the choking of *the word*. In every case where there is failure, we behold a wrong



relationship to *God's Word*. Many have arisen to-day who would speak well of the Lord Jesus, but they disparage the full authority of the Words of Truth. This attitude is criminal. The Lord Jesus showed the importance of associating Himself and His words (Mark 8. 38), and said, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14. 23). If the twentieth century thinks otherwise, the twentieth century is wrong. Men may think us behind the times if we look back to the first century, but believers are actually "before the times" for they look onward to the appearing of the Lord Jesus, "which in His times He shall show" (1 Tim. 6. 15).

Every true child of God has received *the word* aright. In Matthew 13. 23 we have hearing and understanding, reminding us of 1 John 5. 20 and Luke 24. 25. And the holy result is fruit. Is not this important? The aim throughout is fruit. God has a right to fruit. His holy perfection must emphasize fruit. To excuse the absence of fruit would be sin. The vineyard that rendered no fruit was taken from the husbandmen (Matt. 21. 34, 41), and the test whether of the fig tree in Luke 13. 6-9, or of the branch in John 15. 2, is fruit (cf. Matt. 3. 10; 7. 16-20): nothing can take the place of this. God is not seeking cleverness or greatness. The searching character of this parable is now more evident. It is not only dispensational, or general. It has a personal message. Do we bring forth fruit? Have we a holy response to His love in our lives? Our Bible study is with the object of fruit. Every word of God rightly received is fruitful (Col. 1. 6). If there is no fruit, the fault is with us. And in this connection we feel the personal application of the whole passage. Though children of God are a new creation, it is still possible to treat some portions of God's truth in a fleshly way. Is it not easy to find verses of God's testimony towards which even we are more like wayside hearers? And are there not other verses we welcomed till trial and isolation came in on account of the holy principles they set forth? —And now—what effect have these messages in our daily life? Can we find in ourselves some humbling, yet precious, passage which has been choked because we have become more worldly than we once were? Thanks be unto God, if there are portions of His truth which bring forth fruit—more fruit. But it may be that His teaching as to the judgment seat of Christ only as thirty fold, and that as to prayer only sixtyfold. Are there not differences in our assimilation of our Lord's gracious instruction? Do we not desire rather the climax hundredfold (Gen. 26. 12) with regard to all God's will? And,

if our heart is tender (2 Chron. 34. 27), this will be the result increasingly. The wayside is hard, and the rocky ground hard. The usual translation "stony" seems to miss the point. We have here the rock underneath, and a layer of dust like earth—linked with the serpent—on the surface. And,—striking indeed is Christ's description,—it is here that we find joy. Men urge a "happy" giving of the heart to God, without brokenness. When the spirit of grace shall be poured out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the land will mourn; every family apart (Zech. 12. 10, 12). Men have a new theory, a more palatable gospel and mode of profession. But is it the work of the Holy Spirit or strange fire? Where is conviction of sin to-day? Is it sought? Is it expected? The comfortable preaching of an emotionally received gospel is the evidence of a hard heart. This diagnosis is startling, but it is perfect. The One Who spoke these words knew what was in men. The more we ponder, the more we realize the remarkable force of Christ's words. "Anon with joy receiveth it" may at first seem an encouragement. But it is the reverse. Is it a mark of love not to be moved to anguish by the judgment which broke upon the Lord? Is it an evidence of a work of grace to be so glad at personal salvation, that there is a slight sense of sin? Surely such joy is innate selfishness and the proof of a hard heart toward the Lord. And this is exactly what He sets forth! Yet many seek after emotional joy and hurried profession, and almost slur over the deep and painful work of God. The Lord Jesus unveils the real character of this happiness; many are too hard hearted to have felt anything of what their sin means to the Lord Jesus. Will they find themselves among His people in that Day? The theory of salvation by verbal acceptance of Romans 10. 9 as a formula, or by the criterion of "I am happy because I am saved" is very dangerous, and all who encourage it are unconsciously cruel. "A *broken* and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51. 17), and the context there suggests our need, albeit we are believers. Do we not sometimes have joy that is not in the Lord (Phil. 4. 4), and that lacks loving sorrow over sin? Do we enter into our Lord's standpoint and feelings as we should? Need it be stated that there is a joy in the beginning of the Christian life, and after, and that the added words in 1 Thessalonians 1. 6 ("of the Holy Spirit") are blessedly linked with the added contrast, even persistency amid "affliction." The Holy Spirit never leads to a light view of sin (Zech. 12. 10).

This passage agrees with other solemnizing parables; there is no thought that God will cast out those who have come to Him, or that saved ones will become unsaved. The grafted-in branch that is taken away in John 15 is not said to become fruitless; it is never seen with any fruit at any time, and the third ground is thorny before the good seed is sown, and this shows relationship to the first Adam, and a curse (Gen. 3. 17; Heb. 6. 8,—an important help in the explanation of this oft-misunderstood passage). Again, we behold the exact wording of the Holy Spirit. But the fact of eternal salvation never excuses carelessness. Only as we bring forth fruit are we welcomed to enjoy assurance. The test is not orthodoxy but living fruit, for faith worketh by love. Although the ministry of the Lord Jesus is primarily before us, the principles abide. We, too must preach *the word*. Fresh opinions and plausible theories are to be as nothing to us. We are not to please men. The rejected testimony must be given as in Luke 14. 17-20. We may not give the pearls of gospel promises to those who are unclean (Matt. 7. 6); but we are bidden to sound forth the gospel testimony, and as the watchman of Ezekiel 33. 7 to hear the word at God's mouth, and warn them from Him. Our message is not to change with changing times. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. And thanks be unto God there will yet be good ground. If we preach anything else we becloud the issue, for only by a right attitude to *GOD'S WORD* can the true believer be discovered. The wicked one hates *THE WORD*: the child of God brings forth fruit thereby. This is of vital importance. No other ground is good. No other ground produces anything for the Lord's garner. Happy, indeed, are they who "having heard the word keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (remaining under Luke 8. 15). So shall He have the glory when He comes back.

Inasmuch as the Lord Jesus makes this a test parable (Mark 4. 13), we expect that the seed and fine flour will elsewhere portray that which is from Him; and the birds of the air indicate the work of the evil one. But before we reach these in the parable of the mustard seed, we have the tares, of which as we have seen, the Lord Jesus gives His own detailed explanation. And it is the *first* parable of "the kingdom of the heavens" indicating a contrast with local Judaism, and also with outward glory. The Sower is first before us. He sows nothing but good seed. His people belong to Him and He sends them into the world, ("the field is the world") to bring

forth fruit. Helpfully we learn the blessing wrapped up in our earthly circumstances, if we use them aright. He has authority over the earth; it is His field (note John 17. 2), but He does not now show that authority in judgment. He will yet take the heathen as His inheritance (Ps. 2. 8, 9); but at present He "sits" (Ps. 110. 1). He looks for the witness of His people while He is "away"; they are sown with this object. He abides in the house (Matt. 13. 27). It is beautiful to realize that types, and parallels, are often twofold. Are not the servants themselves among the good seed? (cf. the bride and the body in Ephesians 5). The good seed is in the earth, but they also have fellowship with Him in the house. And they bring everything to Him, and rightly wait for His answer and counsel, unlike Israel (Ps. 106. 13); and Saul (1 Sam. 13. 12). and the disciples in Luke 22. 49, 50. Their concern is as to the tares, which do not appear at once, and this is well. But how came the tares? "An enemy hath done this." Observe the same antipathy to the seed as in Matthew 13. 19, but there we find taking away, here an adding. How has this been done? "While men slept." The Master is not said to have slept. The enemy is guilty, but he has taken advantage of sleep. The disciples entered into temptation in Gethsemane through sleep. As this dispensation begins, so it ends, with failure through sleep. "While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Ah, we will not say "ends"; there shall be a gracious reviving, and those who are His will be "ready," but there is much to search us in this twofold "sleep." It is a key to the history of Christendom. It has a message for our personal life: we cannot excuse ourselves. We have not chosen evil deliberately, but have we kept awake? The enemy does not sleep.

The devil's object is to take advantage of our slumbering. Hence the stress on holy wakefulness in the conflict of Ephesians 6. 10-18, and 1 Thessalonians 5. 6-8. We see further, that Satan is not said to pluck up the seed. He cannot, but he can divide the people of God. He sows in the midst. Likewise in John 10 the thief comes *to* kill,—yet we are not told he kills. But the wolf comes and actually catches and *scatters* (verse 12). Thanks be to God, he cannot destroy; neither the enemy, nor the tares, nor even the sleep can kill the wheat. The enemy divides, and accomplishes this oft-times by "imitation Christians." Tares are not unlike wheat—at first. The word is strikingly chosen; by derivation it suggests "vomiting" and this plant has been said to be the only one of the grass

family with poisonous seeds. It produces dizziness. The spiritual parallel is impressive. The surprising fact is before us that the enemy is a patron of some mass movement of "Christian profession" in the present age, linked with a veiling of his personal activity. If we deny this, we deny Christ's parable. If we acknowledge this, we must grieve over Christendom. And this one fact will separate us from human methods to gain numbers and to attain success. Constantine's attitude and the after history of Europe, with so-called "Christian countries" to-day, are explicable in the light of these words, not otherwise. And this simple acknowledgment logically involves the break of humble discipleship from "state churches," and from the great denominations of to-day. The words "Let both grow together until the harvest" refer to the field, i.e., *the world*. It seems strange that any, in spite of Christ's interpretation, argue in favour of mixture in a Christian *assembly*. The whole principle of Scripture, and such passages as 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Timothy 2, and Revelation 2 and 3 impress on believers the need for holy separatedness in a local gathering. We cannot reform the world, nor purge Christendom, but we must seek to carry out all the will of the Lord humbly with those who call upon Him out of a pure heart. "Let both grow" does not only imply that believers are not to use the sword. Indeed, that is not the primary aspect, though *elsewhere* emphasized against Rome's sad perversions. Satan sows his counterfeit, yet he is not here associated with giving physical life, but religious profession. Hence if the planting is not birth, the uprooting is not death. It may seem to involve drastic measures, hence it is fitting that reapers (angels), and not the servants, are thus used, during this dispensation, even as the servants of Matthew 22. 13 are distinguished by the Holy Spirit's word from those of verses 3 and 4 (cf. too "His armies," 7). "*Here is the patience and faith of the saints*" (Rev. 13. 10). The *removal of nominal Christian profession* is before us—the gathering is "out of His kingdom" (41); the casting into the furnace of fire is subsequent. The exactness of Scripture is evident. The tares are *not* said to be taken out of the field when bundled together. And do we not read elsewhere of the overturning of Christendom's profession, (empty though that has been), in the climax 3½ years of the wild beast? We remember how, after supporting the whore of religiousness, he hates her (Rev. 17. 16). Will it not be then that "the kingdom of the heavens shall be likened unto ten virgins"? There are still unsaved ones, but they

are outwardly virginlike. During the *centuries* the enemy has rather aimed at a harlot-like travesty of the bride, yet many count this to be spread of the gospel. The practical bearing of these parables on the Christian life and separation from the great organizations of to-day, is deeply important for the unprejudiced and lowly disciple.

The reason for not gathering up the tares is searching. For years the writer thought, "The tares were at first like the wheat," but the language of Christ conveys a further lesson. "Lest . . . ye root up also the wheat with them." Does not this imply that the wheat sometimes becomes like the tares? This searches us, although we may be "wheat." *Healthy* growth is needful to present the contrast. But, above all reproof, the Lord's love shines out; no wheat shall be uprooted. He watches over all His people. The tendency to recognise all as Christians, who profess so to be, is quite against Scripture, but the other extreme is condemned. We do not know all the wheat, and must not root up, or glibly deny the relationship of any to Christ's kingdom, through our anticipatory judgments. The Lord knoweth them that are His (2 Tim. 2. 19), whether in Protestantism or Romanism. We leave the field to Him, in this connection. Love is sorrowful, yet often silent, as to the solemnizing state of affairs. It is not for us to pronounce either way. It is important to see how practical every passage is. The dispensational and prophetic instruction never makes secondary the Lord's humbling, yet refreshing, message to our hearts, as to His personal love, and our personal need.

The harvest is next before us. Observe "the *time* of the harvest," and "the end (or rather the ending) of the age." This expression occurs in verses 40 and 49, also, and in chapter 24. 3, and the last verse of the gospel (28. 20). The only other occurrence of "ending," is Hebrews 9. 26, alluding to Christ's manifestation on earth. May we not link that with the three and a half years, or so, from John 1. 31? "The ending of the ages" was a special season which seemed to belong to two dispensations—retrospectively and prospectively. Inasmuch as Antichrist will declare himself against Romanism, and every other "ism," and show himself as god, in the *midst* of the last seven years (Dan. 9. 27), will not the tares of Satan's intentional counterfeit be at that very time unmasked? This would make the ending of the age a like period to that of Hebrews 9. 26, and explain "Gather ye together first the tares." The burning is not said to be first. This is important, for the unsaved are not thus *judged* while the Lord's wheat are on

earth, but they are "gathered," for the final confederacies of evil. Many prophetic students ignore this, and assume that the Lord's people will be caught up first, but all Scripture harmonizes with itself. Some may find difficulty in that the reapers gather (at the same time as the change in heaven, Rev. 12. 7), whereas the work is linked with Satan's revelation and that of Antichrist (2 Thess. 2. 9), but this rather helps in view of Revelation 17. 17. The enemy prepares his array, but the Lord ordains the channel for this overflowing flood, so that the angels of the Lord Jesus "gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (lawlessness)—an apt description of defiant ungodliness alone. The bundles appear to remain awhile, but not for long; man's glory is short lived. There *is* a furnace of fire. But, thanks be to God, for the contrasted words "the wheat into My barn." No wheat is placed in the fire, no tares are found in the barn. The breaking up of Christendom will be a stepping stone to the glory of the Lord. The Lord Jesus does not rise up till "the last day" (see Ps. 110. 1), but He can send His angels before; yet (as we have observed) this is *not* physical destruction, which rather takes place *when* the Lord takes the kingdom, and "the righteous shine forth." They are not manifested now (see Col. 3. 4). The heavenly figure of the sun is helpful. The wheat shows us a pilgrim life of fruit-bearing (all the wheat seems to bring forth something for the Lord—26) but the heavenly glory is sure as well.

The contrasted futures are definitely marked. If any are not God's planting they shall be rooted up (Matt. 15. 13). To hide this message would be sinful. There is a tendency to-day to imagine an in-between position, but Scripture shows the glory *and* the judgment. The tares are not saved and then lost. They were never saved, but they appear to have associated with children of God, and acted as if they were. It is observable that the contrast began to be seen as soon as there was "fruit." Thus are children of God to be marked out.

It may be well, ere we approach the parables not explained by the Lord Jesus, to examine the structure of this passage. Everything in Scripture is precious, and there is an unique arrangement and order. It is evident that the mustard seed and leaven go together, as in Luke 13. 18-21. And Matthew 13. 44-46 provides manifestly a pair (selling and buying). The tares and the net, moreover, are alike linked with the ending of the age. Hence we have:—

- a. The Sower (Personal: not "the Kingdom of heaven is like").

- b. The Wheat *and* Tares.
- c.(i) Mustard Seed.
- c.(ii) Leaven (Hid).
- c.(ii) Treasure (Hid).
- c.(i) The Pearl.
- b. The Net, with Good and Bad.
- a. The Householder (Personal: not "the Kingdom of heaven is like").

It is important to realise the Lord's object—even the instruction of His people, that, as He uttered things kept secret, they may learn His truth and bring forth things "new and old" (verse 52) for His joy (cf. Song 7. 13). The setting aside of Israel in Matthew 12. 45, and the stress on spiritual relationship (Matt. 12. 49-50), are followed by the setting aside of Israel's scribes, and a new responsibility for every "scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven" (13. 52). Though somewhat anticipating, we may point out how dear the Lord's people are to Himself, and in how many ways He mentions them. "My brother and sister and mother"; the good ground, the good seed, the treasure, the pearls, and the good fish; and the servants of verse 27 and the scribe of verse 52 show the responsibility of His faithful ones. Individually and collectively are His people before us, and elsewhere other precious language shows again and again His intense love to them. There is always a note of affection in the Lord's ministry, and John 17 reminds us as to this characteristic of His abiding intercession (Heb. 7. 25).

Have we any doubt as to the meaning of the mustard seed? The beginning is small; but the growth is abnormal, "becometh a tree." Does not this imply a contrast with the original appointment, "after his kind" (Gen. 1. 11)? The "frequency" in nature would not make it normal, for nature now contains death, and designed departures from the original plan (e.g. Thorns and thistles, "it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength," Gen. 4. 12) to remind us of the devastation which sin has brought. The over-growth is the *only* reason which the Lord Jesus gives for the entry of "the birds of the air" ("so that"). His explicit statement and His explanation of the birds in verse 19 ("Then cometh the wicked one") would prevent our misunderstanding. Here is a radical *change*, with saddening results. When we add the Lord's interpretation of "His field" (31, with 38), we behold an apparent progress in the earth, with a development of Satanic tactics. The sowing of tares "in the midst" of the wheat has prepared for this.



The Lord has declared the tares will be awhile in His kingdom (41): Hence "the kingdom of heaven is like" presents no hindrance. Satan is not said to pluck up and destroy, after the first parable (when the seed does not denote persons): he aims at "imitations," his method changes, but not his purpose. Any theory that makes the birds good ignores this, as well as Christ's key-explanation (Mark 4. 13). Nor is the figure of a branching tree in the earth without meaning; in Daniel 4 it pictures Nebuchadnezzar, in Ezekiel earthly nations are thus described, and in Hosea 14 Millennial Israel. In the present dispensation may it not here suggest earthly greatness before the appointed time? The words "Therefore He was saying" in the parallel passage (Luke 13. 18), with the added, "Strive to enter in . . . for many . . . will seek . . . and shall not be able" (Luke 13. 24-30), may bear a similar warning.

We think of Luke 9. 43, 14. 15, 16; the Lord Jesus perceived the nature of profession (John 2. 24, 25) and no passage can be found which prophesied great "success" in the present dispensation. The common interpretation is out of harmony with the whole character of His prophecies. As soon as we see a saddening perversion of the narrow way, and the lodging of the emissaries of the evil one, we have a Divine key to the attitude of Constantine, and, to the changes in Europe from a persecuted minority to a state power, i.e. from a Christian brotherhood to Christendom. The woman of Revelation 17 is linked with ruling in verses 2 and 18. Ecclesiasticism with nests for these birds, instead of an assembly devotedness of the bride to the Coming Bridegroom, is the solemn message for our hearts, and if we now find our resting place where the birds of the air find theirs, we are out of harmony with the Lord Jesus. The word "lodge" indicates a tabernacle, and reminds us that the assembly should be God's dwelling place.

It is remarkable that we hear to-day of "branches" of Christendom, but, alas, men glory in that whereof they should be ashamed. It is for us to be humbled. If any one is prepared to make the birds good in spite of Christ's interpretation, he will naturally add the rejoicing in a kingdom-status to-day, and regard success from man's standpoint, but the Lord's message still sounds on some ears that are not deaf, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12. 32), and there is still music in the closing contrast with Revelation 22. 17, "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." The Spirit of God has not changed.

Two objections may be raised, —the first urges that if Christ planted the seed, the result is the development of *His* work. But may we not add to what has been said regarding God's warnings in nature, that the Scripture has answered this objection in previous parables? "The choicest vine . . . it brought forth wild grapes" (Isa. 5. 2), and again "I had planted thee a noble vine wholly a right seed, how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?" (Jer. 2. 21).

The other objection is that the mustard seed was proverbially used to suggest remarkable growth (Matt. 17. 20). Evidently as "less than all the seeds" (not in nature, as a whole, but among those which a man took; the context prevents misunderstanding), it was symbolic, but passages like Luke 17. 6 never mention the undue growth or branches, and it is possible they rather indicate that if we only had a little faith we should do much (see Luke 8. 25), for faith is more precious and more powerful than radium. No objection can be said to have weight against the only interpretation which fits exactly between the introduction of the *tares* and the *leavening* of the fine flour.

This fourth parable shows a woman. Is she the bride or the counterfeit? If we make her to be the Lord's faithful servants we imply that the fine flour pictures evil, and the leaven good—against the symbolism of Christ throughout, and that of all Scripture. Strong evidence would be needed for such a contrary usage. The characteristic of the present age seen in Revelation 17 (illustrated by the position of the woman in the fourth letter of Revelation 2), seems to fit in with the saddening yet evidently true interpretation, which shows corruption of God's fine flour. This suits the context and the added words, "Things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13. 35). The thought of "progress" would be against Christ's testimony, and suggest approval of the very Christendom that has changed His appointments for "strangers and pilgrims." Hence the alternatives are striking—acknowledgment of the leaven as evil, or the nullifying of Christ's testimony in Matthew 24. 9, etc.

A remarkable corroboration is found in the earlier Scriptures. "Three measures" or seahs are an ephah, and thus we find a woman and three measures both in Genesis 18. 6 and Zechariah 5. 5-11. The words "make ready quickly" (cf. Ex. 12. 39) leave us in no doubt as to the absence of leaven in Abraham's arrangement. But the reverse is found in Zechariah.

The preceding parable-prophecy *may* hint Satan's counterfeit of the holy place (measurements in 5. 2), and the "declar-

ing innocent" of the sinner is through that "which frameth mischief by a law" (5.3, marg. Ps. 94.20).<sup>\*</sup> Abiding in the house (5.4) reminds of the birds of the air, in Matthew 13. 32. How remarkable when we behold "wickedness" in the midst of the ephah. "This is wickedness" (cf. 1 Cor. 5. 8). The woman placed herself in the three measures. Nor is this two-fold symbolism strange. Christ is both the One Who builds and the Foundation, and He is the One Who presents that which is unleavened, which likewise pictures Himself. The system of evil puts "self" in the place of Christ, corrupting thereby the fine flour of sound doctrine. The Lord's allusion to Zechariah 5 seems more than probable, and inasmuch as Satan's ark with its talent of lead, (the opposite of the mercy seat), is awhile away from Babylon, to return thence via Palestine (Zech. 5. 11), our hearts realise European Babylonianism in Christendom's nations, exactly that which the Lord Jesus seems to set forth in the parable of the leaven. Yet so few are spiritually affected by this holy warning.

But we have seen this sad interpretation fittingly follows the tares and mustard seed, and leads up to verse 35. Satan at first comes and sows but then goes his way (Matt. 13. 25), content to work through instruments, and the professing church itself. The birds of the air are outward, the leaven is inward. The object of the enemy in both parables is a "change." The world is not being converted; the end of the age is the opposite, even Antichrist's revelation, according to Scripture. There is no prophecy of a so-called "leavening" by the gospel, and the spread of Christ's kingdom. That kingdom is heavenly, and there is a bringing out of the world. But if we have here a corruption of truth gradually but definite, we have that which has taken place and is taking place. Its hidden working, (leaven works in the dark), is the reason why many do not see. But our eyes should be opened and our hearts humbled.

The figure is very impressive. Leaven is a plant (a suited parallel with the mustard seed, though man's science did not know this when Christ spoke), a parasitic plant. This fungus is near at hand, clinging to the very bloom of the grape, but not inside; the slightest "breaking" makes its opportunity. It produces intoxication by altering the grape juice, even as Babylon's cup. When in fine flour, the end is putrefaction; unless stern measures are used. Only fire can deal with this; compromise is ruinous.

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<sup>\*</sup> The Hebrew is difficult. Tho above may be a hint by contrast, if "declare innocent," or "clear" parallels 2 Kings 21-13 (i.e. God's judgment throughout).

The method of Satan is not always open antagonism. Martyrdoms became a power in gospel witness. Balaam tried fornication when direct attack was forbidden (Rev. 2. 14), and this symbol of fellowship with the world (Jas. 4. 4) has often been the "new" plan of the evil one. The adoption of the fine flour of sound doctrine and its phraseology, linked with its gradual corruption, has been so frequent, that it is evident we are face to face with a subtle scheme, not an accident. Words such as "inspiration" and "atonement" have been employed with modified meanings, or, if we take one sphere more fully, even assembly arrangements; we find that if God specially used the word "church" of all saints, or a local assembly, the term has been warped to signify a national or denominational organisation or a building, or to indicate plurality of churches in a city, exactly the meanings God excluded. Baptism has been changed by many from immersion of believers, to the sprinkling of infants. The Lord's *supper* has been "transferred" to the morning and the word "wine," which the Lord Jesus never used, continually employed, and the leavened bread, about which He did not utter one syllable of symbolic teaching or command, substituted for that which He Himself used and lovingly appointed. If in Scripture we are impressed by the exclusion of ecclesiastical titles, whether "pastor" or "elder," we find these commonly sought to-day, and the holy condemnation of the terms "Father" and "Teacher" in Matthew 23 has been set aside by the adoption of the title "Doctor of Divinity", among many who rightly repudiate the former. If there is a special appointment of the Holy Spirit as to married elders, we realise Romanism first misused the term "presbyter," and then with a counterfeit priesthood ordained celibacy. Many can, by grace, see this deliberate leavening, but are not conscious of the sad perpetuation of linked errors. Not a few still observe "Christmas," despite its heathen origin, and introduce in the worship of God arrangements of musical service which are no more dispensational than the "sacrifices" and "priesthood" they deplore. If the Lord Jesus expressly forbade force, some will urge particularly that it is lawful for a Christian man to bear arms, and Christ's clear teaching as to refusal of legal oaths in this dispensation is equally nullified. And some who would grieve over this sin quite ignore—and almost seem to flout—the Holy Spirit's repeated instructions for godly women to dress neatly. The leaven has worked in every way, and is working. The Lord's people appear to be afraid to be unlike the world. But none of us can lift up our heads proudly. We

all need to be humbled. The writer would sorrow, with others, as to his own failure to represent the Lord Jesus, and to follow His gracious will. Yet is the call to awaken still lovingly granted, and our hearts, though they have long hesitated, would now hear and obey.

A striking illustration of the "leavening" has already been hinted. The Lord Jesus appointed two symbolic actions, the second, the Lord's supper, being two-fold. Christendom has not only leavened the doctrine, but the very materials He used. This is very remarkable, because bread and fruit of the vine were probably the two commonest things in Palestine, and in other lands, which are used in both an unleavened and leavened state.\* The change was, and is, "natural" and easy. Faith is needed to keep to the Lord's will. He has permitted this picture lesson to warn us of many errors, and it is significant, in view of His voice, and His *giving* and His words "*Take, eat*" and His "*This do*," that the first woman, who prefigures the professing church misled by the serpent; "*took*" of the forbidden fruit, and "*gave*" to Adam, and he did "*eat*," but the Lord rebuked with the words, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife." And to the designing tempter the solemn judgment sounded "Because thou hast *done this*." May our hearts be attentive, and our eyes be open to seek the Lord's will and to seek none other.

The more we ponder, the more we must realise the gravity of the issue. If the common interpretation of the parable is to be accepted, with the thought of "progress," traditions and developments are sanctified, and the Scriptures *fall*. But if not, the holy view of the Lord Jesus is clear, and His holy hatred of the departure from His simple path is definite. With foreseeing wisdom He forewarned His people: so seriously did He regard the matter. And there is no in-between position. If the leaven is the work of the enemy, separation, though with gracious humility, is no longer optional. The question comes with burning power. Is Christ's standpoint ours, and are His interests ours, or not? Love to beloved children of God who remain in "national churches" must not blind our eyes to His condemnation (Rev. 17. 2) and His eyes are as a flame of fire. "Infant baptism" and similar errors are no longer misunderstandings, but part of an original scheme of the enemy, although, in the knowledge and experience of many, they are now unconscious misunderstandings, largely because of the un-

\* There is a parallel in the process, albeit the ferment remains in the wine, but is burnt out from the bread, though its results remain.

faithfulness of those who have seen something of the terrible plan of evil. But it is love to point this out, if done with lowliness and in the spirit of love, and with a frank acknowledgment that some in the systems of to-day may love their Lord more devotedly than many of us, who have come out, yet may have allowed the enemy to sidetrack awhile into the equally deadly sin of leaving our first love. There is room for a general breaking down and confession. The devil is willing for us to be warmhearted in error, or coldhearted in truth, but he hates the love of the truth, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the light of fulfilment, and of 2 Thessalonians 2, the reference to Zechariah 5 seems clear. In that chapter we have the mystery of lawlessness (feminine) inworking, till the man of sin comes forth. Verses 6 and 7 tell of that which restrains, which seems to be parallel with the talent of lead, and human government, "until he shall have become out of the midst" (verse 7 literally). No mistranslation has been more used than that of this verse, since there is no word "taken" nor is there any word for "the way." The uniform excellence of our version makes this veiling of Satan's plan by the misrendering the more remarkable, in the very passage which tells of a subtle "inworking." If only believers realised that the wickedness now inworking will arise out of the midst in Shinar, as "the man of sin," would they not be stirred the more to look and pray and prepare for that Blessed Hope, that, in love's separation unto the Bridegroom, there might be a godly going forth to meet Him?

It may be well at this point to call to mind the historical parallels many believers have felt between the first seven parables and the epistles of Revelation 2 and 3. And the study is doubtless, suggestive. The sequence in Revelation is impressive. Though the first letter starts much later than the first parable\* the lack of love there indicated had a sad counterpart in history, and, if Smyrna suggests a martyr period, Pergamum may bring before us Constantine's corruption of the "church" and its parallel with the work of Balaam and Balak. remind of the mustard seed, the *third* in each case. And the Jezebel of Thyatira, though primarily personal, hints, and more than hints, the woman and the leaven, reminding moreover of the Jezebel who led Ahab,—and are there not many believers like Jehoshaphat who still compromise with such?

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\* More definitely associated with the second.

The few names in Sardis may bring before us the treasure *hid*, and the refreshment as to Philadelphia may encourage even as the one pearl. There are contrasts as well as parallels, as to the seventh parable and letter, but both bring before us the dread result of sin,—and the casting away and spewing out. May our hearts be bowed down, lest we fall from our steadfastness. Again we look back to see the sowing of the tares *followed* by the coming of the birds and the leavening of the *whole*. The sin is one, and the *hiding* of the aim is evident throughout. Nor is the climax reached at once. Tares are sown, not planted as grown up already: the birds do not come till the branches tell of a radical change: the leaven is not seen at the outset. Only a little is needed to leaven the whole lump. Error does not proclaim its essential character, but if our eyes are not opened early they will be opened too late. These messages of Christ are not only for our study: His words are intensely practical. Are our hearts attentive, or are we still unmindful?

Some may still hesitate on one point, which to them remains as the one difficulty. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven." The parable before has prepared for this, the "change" does not alter the *wording* (e.g. Luke 5. 37, the "*new*" wine becomes fermented, but another name is not then introduced). This is part of the Divine teaching, and in itself indicative of the enemy's unholy tactics adopting words and appearances of truth, but denying the power (2 Tim. 3. 5).

In accord with this, and with the description according to profession, "the kingdom of *heaven*" is likened unto ten *virgins*, although five were *foolish*, and the *holy* city is still thus called in Revelation 11. 2. Nor can we forget the "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." There is no impossibility in such language, but the problem may be to find the special shade of meaning. Here the lesson seems impressive, in accord with the fact that leavened fine flour is still so described, to indicate Satan's attempt in adopting the language of God's truth with a changed meaning. Hence far from being a difficulty the startling words themselves crystallize the sad meaning of the parable.

After the searching message of the hid leaven, with its climax affecting the "whole" (verse 33) we find a change both of place and of persons. The Holy Spirit separates the second set of four parables by a quotation from Psalm 78, and by the words, "Then Jesus sent the MULTITUDE away, and went into the HOUSE." Henceforth we have the disciples

alone, and fittingly the first words are interpretation. We have already meditated on these. The general principles, the dispensational setting, and the call to bring forth fruit, and to hate iniquity, here set forth, are ever important. The contrasted prospects, even the furnace of FIRE, and the shining forth as the SUN must speak to our hearts. "Why," I would ask myself, "Why am I not more earnest in view of all that has been revealed?" The words of the Lord Jesus are ever practical, and again the *present* tenses are before us, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." THIS link with Revelation 2 and 3 is suggestive.

The first parable in the house concerns a field, but not with regard to plant life; the earlier fruit parables thus stand alone, none of the latter are similar. Although the treasure is paired with the pearl, there is also, as we have seen, a structure, whereby the two central parables (4th and 5th) deal with a "hiding." But in the second we have the hiding of that which is precious. The kingdom, as explained to the multitude, might (and would) become corrupted, but the Lord's purpose cannot be broken. Hence the disciples are told of His true people. The treasure was one, though possibly of many parts. We are not told by whom it was first hidden, or when, or why. An eastern may hide his possessions through fear, and for his own use, and another, in finding, may not be entitled to claim. But as to all these things there is an INSPIRED silence, suggesting, it would seem, an appointed contrast with usual reasons of hiding, etc. May we not have here God's loving purpose, hiding His elect people, with a view to the work of His beloved Son, Who came as a Man, at the appointed time, to find, and hide awhile, until returning to claim the purchased land? This seems helped by the rendering "Hid in THE field" (44, see 38). The birds of the air and the heaven cannot destroy His chosen people. The finding preceded the purchase: there is no indication of a display then, rather the opposite. He alone "found," and we have just one illustration in John 1. 43. Another aspect of His finding is suggested by Luke 15. 4. From the standpoint of God's election, His people are a treasure: in their personal condition, they are lost: in both ways the Lord Jesus "finds." God's chronology is not ours, and thus, as the parables of the Sower and of the Wheat and Tares view the fruit at the end from the one sowing, so all the treasure was, as it were, visible to the Lord Jesus. In like manner, all His people's sins were laid



on Him. This difficulty is one from the human viewpoint: but to God all things are present.

In the brief compass of about thirty words we have the treasure, the hiding, the man, the field, the further hiding, the joy, the going away, the selling, the buying. The TWO words already explained in verses 36-43 have been rightly used to be the key, and everything else is fitting. The life, death, resurrection, and coming day of the Lord Jesus Christ are all unveiled, and we behold also something of His gracious and wondrous character. We see His joy in His people, and were not His delights with the sons of men (Prov. 8. 31)? Is not His joy often before us in Scripture, and frequently with a reference to His loved ones? "The oil of gladness above Thy FELLOWS" (Ps. 45. 7). "In that hour Jesus REJOICED in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast . . . revealed them unto BABES" (Luke 10. 21), "Well done, good and faithful SERVANT. . . enter thou into the JOY of thy Lord" (Matt. 25. 21). And His joy was ever in the Father's will (Ps. 16 8, 9, 40. 8). The two-fold thought is found in Isaiah 64. 5: He was the One rejoicing and working righteousness; but at once we have the plural, even *the ones remembering God* in His ways, because they are accepted in the Righteous One Whose obedience is imputed to them as "the righteousness of God." And His exceeding joy in the fruit of His work is seen both in Jude 24, and Song 3. 11 where we have the day of the gladness of His heart. A Greater than Jacob toiled, and wearied not of His work, because of the love He had to His bride. Commandments are not grievous when there is love (1 John 5. 3). There was no forced labour in the obedience unto death of our glorious Saviour. We adore Him. His joy was a joy in the poor, guilty sinners He came to redeem—a joy in the elect of God—and nothing could change His purpose of heart. He went away—the very word used for His death and resurrection in John 8. 21, 22: 13. 36, etc.—and sold all that He had. In His incarnation He, Who was rich, for our sakes became poor, but, as Philippians 2 indicates, He yet further humbled Himself. He SOLD all that He had. We think of the way in which He was stripped of all, even His garments, taken by the Roman soldiers. But this, though typical, was not "SELLING," His personal, active work. Usually we associate it with the obtaining of money, and then the use of that wherewith to buy elsewhere. But the silence of the Holy Spirit as to this would suggest that the two-fold transaction was entirely with the

Father. And thus the precious work of Christ, in giving up all, was not lost, it was brought to God as the purchase price for those to be redeemed. The justice of God shines forth. The fact that they were His by creation, aye, and by electing love before the world's foundation, could not obviate the need for atonement. They must be purchased,—or they must be condemned. And He Who purchases must present an adequate price, and gladly give up the whole. Nothing short of perfection in fulfilling the will of God could be acknowledged, and thus the Lord Jesus sold ALL. The withholding of one detail would have invalidated all. As Daniel 9. 26 reminds us He had NOTHING: nothing could be kept back. But thereby He receives everything, for the purchase is rightly His, and, furthermore, His obedience must become His award in resurrection, in accord with the words, "The Man Who hath done these things shall live in them" (Rom. 10. 5: there is no "if" in the Hebrew of Lev. 18. 5), and if *His*, it must be theirs, for was He not their Substitute? Hence imputation *and* union stand together, and we are made "the *righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor. 5. 21).

Difficulties often lead to blessing. Some may ask—Why purchase the field, as well as the treasure? Matthew 13. 24 has already implied this, and as our beloved Lord was the Last Adam He must have earth's sovereignty (Gen. 1. 28). To withhold this would be to deny the acceptability of His work. As the Son of Man, He will bear the glory on earth (Heb. 2. 5-8), and He will be seen where He was rejected, and His people too are to be manifested where they are now obscure. "The Righteous shall be recompensed IN THE EARTH" (Prov. 11. 31). "That field" must be His, and Jerusalem its centre must be "a praise in the earth." All "spiritualizing away" misses the fulfilment of God's plan, and would destroy His truthfulness.

Some may still ask:—Why the PURCHASE, if the people are God's choice? And why the purchase from God, if they were sold to the enemy? Both questions lead to the further unveiling of our Redeemer's glory. Sin has not only brought in a separation, but guilt, and therefore the deliverance from the debt is necessary, and the payment must be to Him to Whom the debt is owed. God's election is never at the expense of His holy law, but there is a perfect harmony between all His relationships. Again, Satan has NO RIGHT to those who have sold themselves to him for nought (Isa. 52. 3). As a liar and a murderer he has gained a temporary

possession, but no right. And thus he must be cast out, NOT COMPENSATED, and, thanks be unto God, the Lord Jesus was manifested to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3. 8), and render him powerless against the many sons brought to glory (Heb. 2. 10).

The present tense is not an accident. We do not read "He went and sold and bought," but "goeth" and "selleth" and "buyeth." The vividness is not only to help our heartfelt realization, but to remind of the fulness of delight He had, as He made haste to do the Father's will, that we, rejoicing in Him, may not be slothful, or hesitating, but, on the contrary, overflowing with love's intense readiness. Obedience without love would not be obedience. His obedience lacked nothing of love, it was love throughout.

Do we read elsewhere of "selling?" We call to mind the words of Christ to the rich young man, and as He described HIMSELF when He spoke of the Samaritan, so that which the young man failed to do was more than done by our exalted Lord. He not only sold all, and gave, but sold all, and bore judgment itself, that He might be able to give more than earthly food and blessing to the *utterly* poor and helpless. And surely His TREASURE—the same word is found in Matthew 19. 21—will be His eternal joy, and we, as parts of that treasure, shall rejoice with Him. It is all so glorious—what can we do but praise?

Just as the three LATTER parables to the multitudes begin with "The kingdom of heaven is like," so is it, INVERTEDLY, with the three FORMER, addressed to the disciples. Thus these words continually meet us, with their practical message as to the "heavenly calling," even though we are humbled to see that which merely professes to be "heavenly." But in the "treasure" we have reality, and behold the delight of God the Father and God the Son in the redeemed, and our heart would rejoice as we meditate on the fact that we are His by grace and purchase. What manner of persons ought we to be in holy conversation and godliness:—His in love's devotedness.

The sixth parable is closely associated. If we already have guidance as to the Man, the finding, the selling and the buying, the fresh words of verses 45, 46, soon take their place in the picture. The description "Merchant Man" impresses. We realise that one may find a treasure unexpectedly, and APPARENTLY "by accident." Hence this further unveiling.

There was *nothing* of chance, or surprise, in the glorious work of the Lord Jesus. He came to secure a people for Himself. Men may speak glibly of the commercial view of the atonement, but the Holy Spirit has shown us Christ's own stress on the PURCHASE. The work was not an indefinite display of mercy: the Lord Jesus came for a definite transaction of grace. The seeking of goodly, or beautiful, PEARLS may present a difficulty. But is it not in harmony with God's testing of Israel under law, and with the words "These three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none" (Luke 13. 7, cf. Isa. 5. 2, Ps. 14. 2)?\* The Lord Jesus came unto His own possessions, and His own people received Him not. He found no pearls (plural): man is an utter failure. But there is a delightful change—the plural is left, and we find one pearl, and that of great price. A more literal rendering emphasizes this thought, "BUT having found." There is a precious contrast. He could not fail, nor be discouraged. And we shall yet see that, in one aspect, He found, in another He made, this costly pearl. The past tenses here do not remove the joy of the former parable, but they afford another aspect. Our Lord's rejoicing was not the temporary excitement of a child of earth. Here we see the grandeur of His love in counting the cost. As the Merchant Man He knew the value set upon the pearl, and, with definite calculation, "sold all that He had and bought it." His joy did not hinder this definiteness, and yet His view of all the circumstances did not make the action only part of an ETERNAL plan: there was a PRESENT, living joy as He wrought it out. The glory of His perfect character is before us, and every tense used by the Holy Spirit combines to refresh our hearts.

We do not read He bought the sea, to which the ungodly are likened. The sovereign possession of earth was before us in the fifth parable, but here the thought is changed. 'Tis His own people as the fruit of His own work who are brought before us now. The treasure tells of God's election, the pearl of Christ's redemption, the good fish of the Holy Spirit's quickening. The treasure was hidden, the pearl was made, the fish were brought out of the sea individually. Nor do we read of purchasing the oyster-shell, inasmuch as that seems to set forth, like the badger-skins, the humiliation of Christ in the

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\* The treasure may hint this. Christ did not only buy the field, but came first to it, and found the treasure, as if He were about to display it. The long journey of Luke 19. 12 is revealed elsewhere.

days of His flesh, in the body prepared for Him, wherein men saw no beauty. *Now* He is glorified.

And how precious are His people to Himself, and how costly. "One pearl of great price." Nothing but His precious blood could purchase them. But He gladly gave all, and withheld nothing, and, even as the righteous will shine forth as the sun, so will they have the lustre of the pearl, and the rich display of His rainbow-like COVENANT love. Who can tell all that is wrapped up in the love of Christ (Eph. 3. 19)?

The direct teaching of the Lord Jesus is clear, and we would never build doctrine on our own inferences, or on unmentioned thoughts. But there is often much further help for the soul, apparently HINTED by the words used, and, if we test all by the definite statements of Scripture elsewhere, we shall distinguish the Lord's hints from human suggestions. We may therefore reverently ask—Does the Lord give us further blessing by the choice of a pearl? I think so, for a pearl shows that which is holy (Matt. 7. 6), excluding evil and welcoming praise (Rev. 21. 21). It is formed by the living oyster's response to that which pierces and wounds. Here is the lustre of love that WILL not be irritated. May we not thus sum up the life-attitude of our adorable Lord? Thus the pearl, as the beautiful tabernacle-veil, would seem to set forth His perfect life of obedience. But the blessings thereby are AVAILABLE only through His DEATH; and how can the pearl be obtained except via death? We turn again to the revelation of Leviticus 18. 5 (Rom. 10. 5). The remarkable fact is that the only deliverance from a position "under the law" (which Christ took, Gal. 4. 4) is by death (Rom. 7. 1). Hence we reach the apparent paradox that an Obedient One, not deserving death, can never reach the goal, UNLESS He becomes a Substitute for sinners. But if He becomes a Substitute He must finally receive the reward of His obedience after paying the penalty for those for whom He becomes a Substitute. And they, if He has truly taken their doom, must be free, and necessarily have His merits. Hence remarkably the law involves the demand that He should purchase His own obedience, and THAT very obedience becomes (as we have seen) identified with the people in whose place He stood. But such is exactly the wondrous picture suggested by the parable. The Lord Jesus both made and purchased the pearl. and we are His. Truly we may say the Law was with a view to Him:—and not only so, but Nature also was thus arranged.

Nor is this surprising,—their Author is One, and the Same. We can only worship and praise.\*

The seventh parable, in structure and language, reminds of the second. These are the first and last parables in this chapter which begin "The kingdom of heaven is like." The large drag net is cast into the sea, and it gathers of every kind or race (same word, Mark 7. 26, Acts 4. 36, 18. 2). And then we have the drawing on to the shore, and a definite severance, at a time of crisis, but there is no mention of IMMEDIATE glory or wrath. The good are contrasted with the corrupt, as the word signifies. There is not the hint that some "kinds," or nations, are rejected. Rather, the decayed and putrid may bring before us those whose profession is manifestly dead, and loathsome. Such are cast outside, i.e. outside the net. But at the same time the good are gathered into vessels, belonging usually to the owner of the net. The Lord Jesus again gives an explanation. The time is "the ending of the age," which, as we have seen in parable 2, implies a period.† The angels' activity is linked with the same time there. And in both passages we have a twofold action: (a) sever (b) cast them into the furnace of fire. There is no warrant for the IMMEDIATE sequence, any more than the immediate burning in verse 30. The putrid are OUTSIDE the claimed possession of the One Who has authority, whereas the good fish are gathered, on the shore, in separate vessels. May not this refer to the reviving and bringing together of the Lord's people in Scriptural assemblies, when Christendom is overturned, and the daughters of the harlot set manifestly aside? This would harmonise with Matthew 24. 45, 46, and show the Lord's delight in the fellowship and local gatherings of His people.§ The 3½ years are soon over, and the ungodly have the FURTHER casting into the furnace of fire. There is no hint that this takes place at the beginning. As we ponder these solemnizing subjects, let us not alone seek accuracy of interpretation, but a

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\* It is very remarkable that the Law, thus rightly explained, in its positive commands and glory, would fit NO ONE ELSE. It is like the types, definitely with a view to Christ.

† The parallels would seem to include:—One field, one net; wheat, good fish: tares, corrupt fish: the end of the age and the angels in both: gathering out of His kingdom, casting out: final burning.

§ Appropriately the parable to the people speaks of bundles, or gatherings on earth of unsaved ones, ready for judgment: the parable to the disciples suggests gatherings of saved ones, waiting for their Lord.

godly exercise of soul in the Holy Spirit's enabling, that we may be ready for our Lord Jesus, and that we may be concerned as to those who know Him not, and who fear not the "wailing and gnashing of teeth." The practical nature of all Christ's utterances, both on *our own* behalf, and that we may be rightly anxious for *others*, needs continual emphasis.

And now we reach the last parable, the eighth, suggestive of resurrection ground, and a new order of "scribes." The eighth parable is personal, as the first, but there we have Christ in the FIELD, here we have His faithful people (viewed individually, "every"), following His example (note too Song 7. 13) in the HOUSE. The "scribe" is primarily a "writer," and the arrangement of Deuteronomy 17. 18 was very beautiful. I would never regret, when a young man, writing out the New Testament, in a somewhat literal translation. But reading and writing, though precious, are not enough without communion. Hence we have the word "instructed" or "discipled" (note Matt. 28. 18, 19, John 15. 8). It is by grace that we have become God's pupils (John 6. 45). And discipleship, implies docility and loving obedience in the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Lord Jesus by the word "scribe" indicates the setting aside of Judaism. It is interesting to see the words brought over (e.g. assembly, priesthood—belonging to all believers—elder, etc.), that we may seek to please the Lord where the earthly nation failed. We have said the Lord's people are to imitate Him, and is not He the primary Householder of this chapter? Yet, though His disciples are usually described as servants, (and we behold their responsibility in Mark 13. 34, 35), their high privilege and care for one another may be brought before us by the same word.

Furthermore, in one of the parables of redemption, we have seen the Lord's treasure, consisting of His people, and now we rejoice in the treasure of His truth granted to His own. We must have treasures ere we can bring them forth, and though we praise God for new things realized for the first time, we would never weary of the old things also. And our adorable Lord shows that those who POSSESS must USE. "Therefore" implies this responsibility, and may urge that we should emphasize on believers to-day the message of this chapter, that there may be godly separatedness from the world, because of love to Christ. Truth is not given us for our benefit alone: we are trustees. And no part of truth is to be untreasured. It is a wondrous privilege to know the ways of God. The added verses in Matthew 13 show the blindness of Israel and their

unbelief (54-55). Should not our attitude be the one mentioned by the Lord Jesus just before the parables, even the attitude of doing the will of the Father (Matt. 12. 50)? The response of love to all the gracious unveiling of this chapter is also a responsibility. May we grasp this privilege prayerfully, in the Holy Spirit, and bring glory to our adorable Lord, as we look for His Coming.

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## Some Concluding Thoughts for the Heart on Matthew 13.

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How many well-known expressions come in this chapter, and how searching they all are, e.g., "Because they had no root, they withered away," "Blessed are your eyes, for they see," "Persecution ariseth because of the Word," "While men slept," "He sold all that he had," and so forth. The glory of the Lord Jesus shines out in contrast with the failure and sin of men.

As we have seen in the first parable, the relation to the Word of God affects everything, and we need to ask ourselves, Does the enemy take away the Word from *me*? Is there "no deepness of earth" to *my* experience? Have *I* anything that chokes the Word? Further, let us be humbly affected by the warning "while men slept." He cannot thus sow, while God's people are awake.

The third parable testifies against seeking of greatness in this age. How many Christian societies beginning with concern for God's glory have reached a similar broadness; and the parable of the leaven calls our hearts to godly concern in the Holy Spirit, lest we mingle *anything* with God's pure words. The importance of receiving truth as it stands, and of feeding thereon, is very precious.

It is a joy to know that the "buying" of this chapter is by the Lord Jesus: we were bankrupt and helpless; but the practical message for us is beautiful. Now that we are in Him (if, by grace, this is our joyous privilege and experience) let us seek to show more of *His* love for *His* people. He bought them by selling all, and shall not we be devoted (1 John 3. 16)? Moreover, shall it be said that He gave Himself for us, and shall we be unwilling to "buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23. 23) for *anything* of this poor world?

Companion Booklets gladly sent:—

e.g. No. 2.—Five Linked Parables (Matthew 9. 14-17, Mark 2. 18-22, Luke 5. 33-39), and The Parables of the Debtors.