

Matthew's Gospel – 12:38 – 13:30 Signs and Sowing

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Our current series of talks deal with Matthew's Gospel from chapter 11 to the end of chapter 14. Our talk today is number 3 of 5, so if you have missed any of these you can find them on our website. The section of the Gospel we will be considering today is from ch. 12 v. 38 to ch. 13 v. 30, and the title for the talk is, 'signs and sowing.'

There are too many verses for me to read during the talk, but I trust these Scriptures are familiar to most listeners. What a blessing it is to be able to read the Bible in our own language, so please try and find the time to read these verses. The words of the Saviour are so precious!

The verses which I quote will be from the Authorised Version of the Bible, sometimes called the King James Version, and these will be referenced and listed in the transcript which can be found on our website, www.truthfortoday.org.uk. Please feel free to download any of our talks to listen to, or print them off, to read. If you have been blessed by our ministry, then please tell your Christian friends about us.

Background

If you are a regular listener to our broadcasts, you will have had an exposition on the chapters leading up to where we begin today. You will have heard that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, has been rejected (for the most) by the nation of Israel. In ch. 11 He upbraids (or reprimands) the cities who had witnessed His mighty works for their unbelief and rejection of Him. *I always find it sad when the Lord says,*

"And thou, Capernaum, which are exalted to heaven, shall be brought down to hell..." (11:23).

As I think of the tremendous testimony God has given to our nation. Indeed, my own country, Scotland, was once known as "The land of the Book", so many blessings we have experienced over the years, exalted to heaven, yet we have turned our back upon God.

From verse 28 of ch. 11 the Lord's message is no longer a call to the nation but a personal invitation,

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Signs and sowing

The opposition the Lord Jesus faced from the Pharisees and Scribes was relentless as we find in the opening verses of ch. 12. Where we begin today, we read,

“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee” (v.38).

This is quite an astounding request, made by those who had witnessed miracle after miracle. I looked back and counted 10 distinct miracles recorded in chs. 8 & 9 and another 2 in ch. 12. Apart from these we also read in ch. 8 v. 16,

“When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.”

Talk about none being so blind as those who don't want to see! I'm not sure what lay behind their enquiry, but it certainly revealed the darkness of their hearts.

In answer the Lord said,

“An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall be no sign given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (v39-40).

Here the Lord uses the well-known story of Jonah who was swallowed by the whale then after 3 days was spat out on dry land, as a type (or picture) of His own death and resurrection. But their ears were closed to the words which the Lord spoke. The generation which saw and heard the Lord during His ministry, yet still did not believe, will be judged accordingly. The people of Nineveh heard the preaching of Jonah and repented of their wickedness. The queen of Sheba saw the greatness of Solomon and her spirit was moved. In contrast to these responses from Gentiles, the leaders of the Jewish nation were unmoved even although they had both seen and heard One who was greater than both Jonah and Solomon.

We often find that the Lord was pretty direct in His teachings to the leaders of Israel. In verses 43-45, which follow, Jesus warns them of the folly of self-reformation and describes their last state as being worse than the first. The scribes and the Pharisees took pride in the position they had amongst the people and in their knowledge of the Scriptures. They would have certainly considered themselves to be “empty, swept, and garnished” houses. Outwardly they were following the law, but their hearts were far from God. (I need to be careful not to give the impression that there were not any amongst the scribes and Pharisees who were right with God; there were, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, for example, but in the main these religious men were opposed to the Lord Jesus). Religion without a living relationship with God is a dangerous thing! The Lord Jesus told the illustration of the demon-possessed man whose last state was worse than the first and said,

“Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation” (v.45)

Perhaps this also looks on to a time, yet future, when the unbelieving nation of Israel will worship the Antichrist and the Beast during the tribulation period.

The last 5 verses of ch. 12 are very instructive, showing that spiritual relationships supersede natural relationships. The Lord's mother and His brethren wanted to talk with Him, and this

message was conveyed to Jesus. I think it is significant that Joseph is not mentioned after the early chapters of the Gospel record; and I believe it was likely that Mary was a widow by this time, as during His teaching ministry, when the Lord spoke of His Father, there could be no question that He ever meant Joseph. Mary certainly was a widow at the time of the crucifixion, the Lord committing her to the care of His disciple John. This is also very instructive, that the Lord committed His mother to John even although He had natural family. The brothers and sisters of Jesus are mentioned at the end of ch. 13,

“Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?” (vv. 55-56).

In reply to the one who bore the message, Jesus said,

“Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Matthew ch. 13 is one of the great biblical texts. In it, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks the seven parables of the kingdom of heaven. In Leviticus ch. 23, through Moses, Jehovah gives instruction concerning the seven feasts of the LORD. In Revelation chs. 2 & 3, through John, we have the addresses to the seven churches by the risen Lord, Himself. We will not say anything of the sevens of Leviticus or Revelation now, but a careful study will amply repay any who make the effort.

We read in ch. 13 v. 1,

“The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him.”

I suggest that these words, in setting the scene, are more important than perhaps they first appear. This is a deliberate act of the Lord Jesus, leaving the confines of the house (which would be a picture of Israel) and moving into the open spaces (a picture of the whole world). The kingdom of heaven, of which the Lord now speaks, cannot be restricted to the nation of Israel. It is also interesting that the first 4 parables of the kingdom are spoken outside and then the last 3 are spoken after the Lord and the disciples had gone back into the house.

The great multitudes caused the Lord to go into a boat so he could address the crowds on the seashore. What a sight that must have been! Now the Master begins to speak to the people in parables, something He had not done previously. Parables have been described as ‘a natural story with a spiritual meaning.’ Natural stories had been told in the Old Testament to cause folks to think of spiritual issues. The prophet Nathan told a pitiable story of a little lamb in order to convict king David of his great sin (see 2 Samuel ch. 12 vv. 1-10). But now, for the first time, Jesus begins to speak in parables. When the disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables and Jesus said,

“Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given. ...Therefore speak I unto them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (see vv. 11-13).

He then quoted from the prophecy of Isaiah who also spoke of the people’s inability to see, hear, or understand, the things of God.

We need to bear in mind that the nation of Israel had rejected, out of hand, the clear and public witness of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Because of their state of being spiritually blind, deaf, and hard-hearted, they were not fit to receive the 'mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.' Perhaps we need to explain what is meant by 'mysteries' and 'the kingdom of heaven' before we go any further in our talk.

The idea of a kingdom was a well-known one. It was an area or group of people over which a king exercised his rule and power. In fact, the idea of the kingdom of heaven was not new either. Back in the days of the great Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, the prophet Daniel was bold enough to declare the kingdom of heaven and that the Most High ruled in the kingdoms of men. The rule of the heavens is not seen today outwardly, but it is there just the same. Those who are given power, or take it to themselves, would be wise to consider the words of Psalm 2 and the One who "sitteth in the heavens."

The idea of a mystery is the revealing of something new or perhaps more correctly, something previously hidden. It is not something dark nor mysterious, but rather a truth which is now being brought out into the open. I guess it is little wonder then that it is the apostle Paul in the New Testament epistles who speaks most concerning mysteries. Romans ch. 16 v. 25 seems to me to sum up the idea of a mystery,

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began."

What a wonderful thing it is that to us, believers of this dispensation, these previously unknown truths are now made known by the Spirit of truth through the Holy Scriptures.

I will read the first parable which Jesus told, as it is vital that we understand this if we are to understand any of the others which follow.

"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" (vv.3-9).

In most cases we are left to exercise our renewed minds as to the meaning of the parables which Jesus told. We need to be careful and interpret Scripture with Scripture that we might be able rightly divide the word of truth. There are differing views about the parables which follow, but I am confident that the speaker next week will give a clear interpretation. However, we have no such difficulties about our section today.

The Master not only tells the parable, but He gives the interpretation. After all seven parables are spoken, Jesus asked the disciples if they understood all these things? Their reply was, "Yea, Lord." I wonder if they really did understand all these things, remember that unlike us, they did not have the New Testament epistles or the Revelation of Jesus Christ, by John. I sometimes feel that it is a pity that they didn't say, "No, not really Lord", then we would have had His interpretation on all these parables. But we have the Holy Spirit, and we trust Him to guide us into all truth.

So, let's look at this first parable which Jesus told. It was a perfectly normal sight to see a farmer sowing seed in a field, but Jesus gives a heavenly meaning to this earthly story. It is interesting that the verb "to broadcast" can mean "to scatter seed over a wide area"; and that is how the farmer sowed in those days. The Sower here and in the second parable is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of man (v. 37). The seed is the word of God. We learn this from Luke's account (see Luke ch. 8 v. 11). The field is the world (v. 38).

All this is very instructive. Until now, Israel had been the vineyard of God. Blessed in every way possible, Jehovah was looking for fruit from His ancient people. If we cast our minds forward to ch. 21, we read another parable which Jesus told, and the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that He spoke of them.

"There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen..." (see vv. 33-46).

Numerous servants were sent to receive the fruit for the householder, but they were beaten, stoned and killed. Last of all the householder sent his son, saying,

"They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come let us kill him and let us seize on his inheritance" (vv.37-38).

The Jewish rejection of their Messiah meant that there would be a new way of divine working, broadcasting the good seed of the Word, to a wider audience, that there might be fruit for God. The Master was the Sower, but the work of evangelism is continued by His servants and will be continued until the end of the age (see v. 39 JND). So, this work has continued till the present day. Each day the Word of God is being broadcast and every day there are those who are brought into the kingdom, I believe.

Of course, there is opposition. You would expect that, wouldn't you! Wherever there is a work of God going on, Satan is also busy, ready to snatch away the good seed. The Lord spoke of 4 types of ground upon which the seed fell. You see, the seed was broadcast widely and not restricted to prepared ground. He spoke of the wayside, the stony ground, the thorny ground, and the good ground. These have been likened to the hard-hearted, the shallow-hearted, the half-hearted, and the whole-hearted. I think we know that when the Gospel is preached, the condition of the hearts of men and women are exposed. Some simply won't listen, and the word is lost to them. Some listen and may even make a profession of faith, but this comes to nothing in the face of opposition or worldly interests. I'm not sure why some Christians have the idea that the whole world will be converted as evidently it will not be the case. These 3 types of grounds (or hearts) demonstrate that,

"Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (see Matthew ch. 7 v. 13).

But there is also good ground, which bears fruit in varying quantities. Here is a challenge for every believer, how much fruit do we produce for God in our lives?

Arriving at verse 24 we read,

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven 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.”

The Lord Jesus then told another two parables, concerning mustard seed and leaven before sending the multitude away. Once again “inside the house”, the disciples came to him saying,

“Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field” (v. 36).

The Lord graciously did just that, and then went on to speak another three parables. These five parables (two spoken outside the house, and three spoken in the house) will be the subject of next week’s broadcast.

Again, we see in the parable of the wheat and the tares, that the Sower of the good seed is the Son of man and the field is the world. The broadcasting of the Word of God would be continued by the apostles beginning at “Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (see Acts ch. 1 v. 8). However, we must be careful to see that the Lord gives a different meaning to the good seed. Here the seed are “the children of the kingdom.” So, the good seed is that which the sowing of the Word of God has produced and was evidenced when the blade sprung up. But there was a problem, growing with the wheat there were tares, or darnel. The servants enquired as to the source of these tares, saying, “Sir didst not thou sow good seed in thy field?”, only to learn that these tares had been the deliberate work of “an enemy.” You will note that it was while men slept, that the householder’s enemy came and sowed the tares among the wheat. Again, this is a word to us, to be vigilant, to “watch and pray.”

We need to be constantly reminded that we live in a spiritually hostile environment. Our fight is not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual foes. Writing to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul says,

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (see Ephesians ch. 6 vv. 11-12).

We need to remember that the world is opposed to the Father, the flesh is opposed to the Spirit, and Satan is opposed to Christ. Let us heed the warnings of Scripture,

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (see 1 Peter ch. 5 v. 8).

“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (see 2 Corinthians ch. 11 v. 14).

So, we find that not only do the wheat and tares grow together in the field, but they will also not be separated until the harvest. This is most instructive and we must understand that the Lord is speaking of the “kingdom of heaven” and not of the church. There is no thought that anything which is dishonouring to the Lord Jesus Christ should be allowed a place in His church. The

epistles give instruction as to what needs to be done in respect of judging evil doctrine, or evil practice in the church (see Galatians ch. 5 vv. 1-10 ; 1 Corinthians ch. 5 vv. 1-8). But the kingdom of heaven is a much broader company of professing Christians, sometimes called Christendom. The true church is part of Christendom, but there are tares as well as wheat who profess to be under the authority of heaven.

The reapers are the angels who will, at the command of Christ, separate the tares from the wheat at the end of the age (v.39). The tares will be gathered in bundles for burning, but the wheat will be gathered into the barn (v.30 with vv.40-43). So while we live in days when there is much which has a place in Christendom but which is offensive to the Son of man, we know that the harvest day is coming. Then there will be a great final separation,

“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (see v. 43).

May God bless you all.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk in our Matthew’s Gospel series – Signs and Sowing. Talk number T1308.

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