

Gospel of Matthew Chapter 13 -- John Karmelich

1. A common idiom of our day is, "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer."
 - a) Did you know this was "biblical"?
 - b) It is in the spiritual sense. The spiritual rich get richer and the spiritually poor get poorer.
 - c) "He (Jesus) replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. (Luke 19:26, NIV)
 - d) This means that those who seek God grow in their maturity. They become more "spiritually rich" as they learn to trust God more and more in their relationship.
 - e) Those who turn away from God also grow *more* spiritually poor.
 - f) OK John, that is interesting. What does this have to do with Chapter 13?
 - i) So glad you asked! ☺
2. Chapter 13 is, with the exception of a few verses, Jesus talking in parables.
 - a) Parables are stories and illustrations designed to make a point.
 - b) There are 7 parables in this chapter.
 - i) Jesus only explains two of them and only to his disciples in private.
 - c) The good news of Chapter 13 is Jesus explains why he speaks in parables:
 - i) "He (Jesus) replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you (i.e., my disciples), but not to them (non-believers). Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. (Verses 11-12 of Chapter 13).
 - ii) Jesus speaks in parables so that the "spiritually lazy" will ignore him.
 - iii) Let's face it, if you don't care about Jesus, you have no interest to figure out what Jesus meant by the parables.
 - iv) If you are prayerfully studying your bible, or sitting there reading these notes, you *desire* to grow spiritually as you want to know what Jesus meant.
 - v) Speaking in parables was Jesus way of separating those who want to follow Jesus from those who didn't.
 - a) "I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me." (Proverbs 8:17 NIV)
3. Now that we know Jesus style of speaking in Chapter 13, what is the topic of the chapter?
 - a) The topic is "God's kingdom". It refers to those who follow Jesus and have an eternal reward in heaven for turning their lives over to Him.
 - b) The topic is designed to be taught only to those who desire to be part of that kingdom. Thus the necessity of Jesus speaking in parables.
 - c) There are lots of parables in this chapter.
 - i) Some are to illustrate life here on earth as followers in Jesus.
 - ii) Some are to illustrate eternal judgments and rewards.
 - iii) Some are to illustrate how Jesus is to separate believers from non-believers.
 - iv) Others illustrate the Gospel message itself, of Jesus paying the price of our sins.
4. One of the big-picture ideas to get about the bible is that Christian believers are not the only ones in heaven, but somehow we are "more special" than say, Old Testament saints or those who make it into heaven with only a limited knowledge of Jesus.
 - a) There are two judgments discussed in Revelation Chapter 20.
 - b) The first is only for believers. At this time we are rewarded for our service for Christ.
 - c) The second judgment, a thousand years later, is for everyone else. You get the impression that some do make it into heaven in this judgment but most do not.

- d) My point is that among the group that makes it into heaven, the Christian New Testament believers are a special “subset” of all of those who spend eternity in heaven.
 - i) “But you (believers in Jesus) are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1st Peter 2:9, NIV)
 - e) Because we are a “special people” Jesus take the time to describe what is in store for believers, both on earth and in heaven. That is the purpose of Chapter 13.
5. There are 58 verses today. Time to get going! Verse 1: That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.
- a) There are some people who believe this is a collection of parables that Matthew combined in Chapter 13. Notice the opening words of Verse 1: “That same day”.
 - b) I take the view that Matthew, trained as a Roman tax collector, knew “Roman shorthand” and could write fast. Jesus could have also “filled in the blanks” for him later. ☺
 - i) My point is simply that all of these parables were given at one time.
 - c) Jesus sat in a boat a little distance off the shore.
 - i) This prevented people from thronging to him.
 - ii) Further, the water surface acts as a natural sound amplifier to the shores. Remember there were no microphones in those days.
6. Verse 3: Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”
- a) Verses 3-9 are one of the most famous parables in the bible.
 - b) This same parable is also told in Mark’s and Luke’s Gospel.
 - c) It describes a farmer sowing seed in the ground. There are four results.
 - i) One type falls on hard ground, and the birds ate it up.
 - ii) One type falls on rocky ground, and it failed to take root when the sun scorched it.
 - iii) One type falls among thorns that choked up the plants.
 - iv) The last type fell on “good soil” and produced a crop.
 - v) In this agriculture society a “good crop” would be eight times the amount of produce based on the seed. Therefore, when Jesus said the “good crop” produces 100, 60 or 30 times, he meant something greater than “normal” crop.
 - d) Now the good news is the Jesus explains this parable. It makes my job easy. ☺
 - i) Verse 18 says, “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means:”
 - e) Let’s break up this paragraph with the verses that tie together with these verses.
 - i) Verse 3: A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.
 - ii) Verse 19: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.
 - iii) The first thing we notice is that Jesus is not being literal.
 - a) I take the view that the best way to interpret the bible is the literal view.
 - b) There are times when not to take your bible literally. The obvious time is when the author himself does not interpret the text as being literal.
 - iv) The second thing to notice is that the “seed” refers to the Gospel message. This is obvious by comparing Verses 3-4 with Verse 19.

- v) By the same comparison “birds” are symbolically used to describe Satan/demons.
 - a) God is not anti-bird. ☺ Birds are simply used in this parable as an illustration. The same way birds will quickly swoop down and eat seeds laying on a hard ground, so Satan will “swoop up” God’s word before it can take root in a person.
 - b) There are many people who will hear the gospel message and simply walk away. They won’t get it. These people fall into this category.
- f) Let’s tie the next pair together:
 - i) Verse 5: Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.
 - ii) Verse 20: The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.
 - iii) For a plant to survive, it must develop strong roots. If not, the wind will knock it over or the hot sun will dehydrate it. The same applies to our spiritual condition. One can hear the gospel message and get excited. Yet later, when trouble or persecution comes, they walk away.
 - a) One “promise” to all Christians is that we will be persecuted. (2 Tim. 3:12)
 - (1) Notice Verse 21 says, “Persecution comes because of the word’.
 - b) Satan doesn’t want more Christians. Therefore, he focuses his energy on persecuting Christians so they won’t be effective witnesses for Christ.
 - c) Satan reads his bible too! ☺ He knows that many who initially follow Jesus will turn away because of persecution. Therefore, Satan initiates persecution in order to discourage Christians to pray and be good witnesses to other potential Christians.
- g) Let’s tie the third pair together:
 - i) Verse 7: Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.
 - ii) Verse 22: The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.
 - iii) The “thrones” represent the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth.
 - iv) Remember that to follow Jesus is a full time commitment.
 - a) Following Jesus is not just saying, “I believe in Jesus, then just living your life as you always have. It is a lifelong commitment. (Yes we have bad days where we fail. It is not about perfection. This is about commitment.)
 - (1) Jesus said, “Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:38-39, NIV)
 - b) Back to Verse 7 and 22, Jesus is comparing “worrying” and going after riches as “choking” our relationship with Jesus.
 - (1) If we are focusing our lives on something other than God, (e.g., worrying about things, or pursuing material aspects) than we are not focusing on God.
 - (2) Worrying is the opposite of faith. Worrying is taking responsibility upon yourself that God never intended for you to take.

- h) Finally, we have the “good” pair of verses:
 - i) Verse 8: Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.
 - ii) Verse 23: But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."
 - a) To those who “take root” in Jesus, he promises us a crop greater than what can be naturally produced. Again, a typical ratio of seed to crop is 8 times.
 - b) To live a life in service to God is to do greater things than what can be accomplished by living for your own set of goals or accomplishments.
 - (1) “I (Jesus) tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12, NIV)
 - c) The mistake we make is that we look at our government leaders or captains of industry and think, “Oh, these are great men who have accomplished far more than I’ll ever accomplish”.
 - (1) First of all, I’m not putting down people like that.
 - (2) God raises up leaders like that in society.
 - (3) I believe that greater rewards in heaven await those who live in service to God than these worldly leaders. We are taking steps to lead people to eternity. Praying for others salvation, being a good witness to others, living in service for Christ, produces “fruit” at a rate of 100, 60 or 30.
 - (4) Just exactly “how much” fruit we produce is up to God, and not us. Our job is to make ourselves available to God and step out in faith and let God use us. The results are his problem. He only promises us that what we produce for God is far greater than what we can naturally produce on our own.
 - d) I also want to discuss the literalness of “100, 60 or 30”.
 - (1) There are commentaries filled with speculation as to what those numbers “secretly mean”.
 - (2) I believe Jesus choose those numbers simply to illustrate that as believers we will produce far greater fruit than what is common in agriculture. The varying number means that some will produce more than others. That is it.
- i) In Verse 9, Jesus ends this parable with: “He who has ears, let him hear.”
 - i) This is Jesus trademark expression.
 - ii) It goes back to my opening premise of the “spiritually rich get richer and the spiritually poor get poorer”. Jesus desires that we read and hear these verses and let them sink into our heads about what they mean and how to apply them.
- j) Some commentators I read take the “4 soils” parable, that we read here one step further:
 - i) They say that all four types can apply to all believers:
 - ii) There may be some aspects of our lives that we haven’t given over to God and therefore the “birds eat that part of the soil”.
 - iii) There may be some aspects, or some days when we fear persecution or care more about material things where we are not living in service to God.
 - iv) There are other days when we pray and study God’s word, and make ourselves available to God, where God does use us.
 - v) While this pattern can be true, I do believe they are reading this out of context.
 - vi) Jesus describes this parable being about different types of people, not about “good days” and “bad days” for the Christian. Therefore I disagree with this view.

7. Verse 10: The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"
¹¹ He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and he will have abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.
- a) I talked about this set of verses in the opening.
 - b) The disciples are asking why Jesus is talking in parables and not blunt sentences.
 - c) Verses 11-17 are Jesus' response to that question.
 - d) "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you (us!)"
 - e) Jesus talks in parables so those who seek God's kingdom diligently study and learn what it is all about.
 - f) This is Jesus "weeding out" program, to separate the true believers from those who don't care about Christianity.
 - g) What makes this concept so special is that it brings the "free-will" aspect into our lives.
 - i) People can willfully choose to not learn more about Jesus.
 - ii) This means they will have no excuse on judgment day.
 - iii) That is why Jesus chooses this method of teaching.
8. Verse 13: This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: " `You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'
- a) Verse 15 is a quote of Isaiah 6, Verses 9-10.
 - b) Jesus is saying he speaks in parables to fulfill the prophecy as listed in Isaiah.
 - c) Let me try to paraphrase what Isaiah is saying, "The gospel message is obvious for anyone who hears it. If you think about it logically it makes sense. But since you willfully choose to reject Jesus, I God-the-Father, will *make* your hearts (not your heads!) "cold" to understanding the message."
 - i) Remember my opening premise of the "spiritually rich get richer and the spiritually poor get poorer"? That is what is being taught in Isaiah.
 - ii) Whether we like it or not, God's redemptive plan is saying in effect, "If you choose to willfully reject God, I'll make it harder and harder for you to change".
 - d) Why is that? Doesn't God want everyone to be saved?
 - i) First of all, yes he does. (See 1st Timothy 2:4 for verification!)
 - ii) I believe part of it has to do with our free will. God will not violate our free will. The gospel message is logical to those who contemplate it. Yet, if you willfully choose to accept the gospel message, God is saying in effect "Ok, if that is what you want, I'll make it so you can't accept it".
 - iii) Is there a point of no return? I don't know that point. I pray for many around me that their heart be opened to the truth. Only God the Father knows who will be saved and who won't. Our job is not to worry about that and pray for all people.
9. Verse 16: But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.
- a) Jesus says that we are to be grateful that God choose us and have eternal salvation. I don't know why God choose me and not others, but I am grateful He did and I want to live out my life here on earth in gratitude of that fact.
 - b) I do pray for the "lost", but at the same time I am grateful that God choose me.
10. Verse 17: For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.
- a) I stated earlier that Christians are a "special subset" of all those who get to spend eternity in the presence of God in heaven.
 - i) In that sense, we are blessed because we get to understand God's greater purpose.

- b) Let's talk about the phrase "many prophets and righteous men".
 - i) This indicates to me that many Old Testament people spend eternity with God.
 - ii) The Old Testament Prophets had "some" understanding of Jesus and the Messiah.
 - iii) It also means they desired to see the work of the Messiah (Jesus).
 - iv) They may not have fully comprehended it, but they wanted to see it.
- 11. Verses 18-23 have already been discussed.
 - a) This is the explanation of the "four types of soil" parable given in Verses 3-8.
 - b) Therefore, to save time, I'm moving on to the next verse.
 - c) Verses 10-23 are "out of time" of the rest of the chapter.
 - i) Notice Verse 10 says, "The disciples came to him and asked".
 - ii) This means that Verses 10-23 are not part of the "parable speech" given from Jesus off of a boat on the shores of Lake Galilee to a large crowd.
 - iii) These verses were given later in time as an explanation of the verses.
- 12. Beginning in Verse 24, we have a bunch of other parable stories.
 - a) Each one begins with the phrase "He (Jesus) told them another parable.
 - b) Who is Jesus speaking to in Verse 24? Are "them" the disciples or the crowds?
 - c) The answer is Verse 36 of this chapter:
 - i) Then he (Jesus) left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."
 - ii) This means that the other parables were spoken to the "crowd" and not just to the 12 disciples.
 - iii) It is given to the disciples and to us to understand the meaning of the parables, but not the crowds.
- 13. Verse 24: Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' ²⁸ " 'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' "
 - a) This is the only other parable where Jesus gives an explanation in Verses 37-43.
 - b) Like last time, I'll break this up and tie the parable verses with the explanation.
 - c) Let's break this paragraph up into bite-size chunks with the explaining verses:
 - d) Here is the first set of comparative verses:
 - i) Vs. 24: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field."
 - ii) Vs. 37-38a: "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom."
 - iii) The first thing to notice is that Jesus is not being literal.
 - a) He is not referring to a literal field and literal wheat.
 - b) Verse 37 teaches us that the one sowing the "good seed" is the Son of Man. This is a title of Jesus himself.
 - c) The seed itself represents the "sons of the kingdom", which is believers.
 - d) The field is the world, which means the people of the world.
 - e) Now, let's look at the next set of comparisons:
 - i) Verse 25: "But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away."
 - ii) Verse 38b-39a: "The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. "

- iii) In this parable, the enemy itself is the devil. The “weeds” the sons of the evil one.
 - a) Therefore, are the weeds referring to demons or non-believers?
 - b) I would argue non-believers, because Verse 25 says that the enemy (devil) sowed “weeds” among the wheat.
 - c) I would argue that this is referring to false believers in the church.
 - (1) This would include cult members who claim they Christians.
 - (2) It would include those who go to church, but don’t really believe it.
 - (3) It would include false-prophets among church members.
 - (4) It would include those who started out sincere, but the influence of Satan himself caused these people to turn away.
- iv) Notice it says, “while everyone was sleeping” is when the enemy sowed.
 - a) You get the impression that because the church’s “guard was down”, is when the devil (“enemy”) allows false believers in the church.
 - b) What pop’s in my head is the fact that the night before Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus asked Peter to pray with him three times. All three times Peter fell asleep. I’m not anti-sleep. ☺ The point is the importance of prayer in preparation for service for God and for protection.
 - c) Remember Jesus gave these parables to describe the future Christian era.
 - (1) When Jesus is describing the “kingdom of God” in these parables, he is giving predictions about what the Christian era will be like.
 - (2) He is predicting false-prophets will be among believers.
 - (3) He is saying lack of “being-on-guard” will allow these people to come on in and be mingled in with the church.
- f) The next set of verses doesn’t have a direct explanation. Let’s just talk about them directly: Verse 26: When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' ²⁸ " 'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.
- i) It may help for all of us city slickers to explain more about the wheat. ☺
 - a) There is a wheat look-alike called a “tare” in most translations.
 - (1) The NIV calls it weeds.
 - b) The point is that this weed/tare looks just like wheat, but it is worthless.
 - c) As they are growing, they look alike. It isn’t until both are fully budded that one can tell them apart.
 - d) The same goes for false-believers in the church. In Paul’s 2nd Letter to Timothy, he spends an entire chapter dealing with false believers within the church (Chapter 3). Paul’s point is that the false-believer will become obvious by his conduct.
- ii) Verse 28 ends with the “owner’s servants” asking the question, “Where then did the weeds come from?”
 - a) First of all, who are the “owner’s servants”?
 - (1) The “owner” is the owner-of-the-field.
 - (2) That would be God, or Jesus-as-God in this analogy.
 - (3) Therefore, we as believers are the owner-servants.
 - b) The interesting point is we don’t know how these false believers got there.
 - (1) “We” can’t tell them apart until they are fully-budded.
 - (2) Notice the believers are turning to God to solve the problem of the false believers. I believe this analogy can be compared to a prayer.

- iii) Verse 28 asks the question, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?”
 - a) Jesus responds in Verse 29 with “No,’ ...because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.”
 - (1) Jesus is saying don’t separate the “wheat from the weeds” because you may accidentally kill the wheat while doing so.
 - b) I believe Jesus is referring to judging people for eternal salvation.
 - (1) There are lots of places in the New Testament where Jesus teaches we are to excommunicate from the church those who are out to do the church harm. Paul teaches this heavily in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Even Jesus himself teaches to separate believers from non-believers. (See Matthew 18:15-17)
 - (2) The bible does not contradict itself. Therefore, what Jesus must be talking about is eternal salvation.
 - (3) We as human beings can’t read minds. We can only judge actions.
 - (4) God himself can read our thoughts. Therefore only God knows who in their hearts truly believes and truly does not.
 - (5) What Jesus is teaching is for example, don’t kill someone for being a non-believer, unless you accidentally kill a believer or one who will turn and be a believer. You can ex-communicate them, but it is God’s job to judge them eternally, not yours.
 - (a) This is why I believe, it was wrong in the middle ages for the church to burn heretics at the stake.
- g) Let’s get back to Jesus explanation of this parable:
 - i) Verse 28: “ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ” ²⁹ “ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them.’ ”
 - ii) Verse 39b: “The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.”

⁴⁰ “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”

 - a) Verses 39-40 are teaching that the “harvest” is the end of the age, which would be the end of the Christian era when Jesus returns for the church.
 - (1) This leads to a whole discussion about when we are judged. Are we judged when we first die? How does time work in heaven?
 - (2) My personal view is that time doesn’t exist in heaven. God created all things including time. Therefore, when we die, we enter the “eternal now”. Time still exists on earth, but not in heaven. This is how everyone, past, present and future can be judged “at the same time”. There is no time in heaven, just the “eternal now”.
 - (3) I spoke in my introduction about the fact there are two judgments in heaven, a 1,000 years apart. That time differential may be in “earth standard-time” and not “heaven standard-time” ☺.
 - b) This is one of many places in the bible where Jesus describes a literal eternal hell. Some cult groups like the Jehovah Witnesses do not believe in a literal hell. Verse 42 teaches the opposite.

- c) I'm fascinated by the word "then" in Verse 43. Verse 43 says that after the unrighteousness are thrown into the fiery furnace, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun".
 - (1) Our joy in heaven is to spend eternity with God. Part of the reason we don't have a better relationship with God now is the influence of the outside world. Jesus is teaching that once that is taken away, we can "shine better". That means our glorified state in heaven will not be polluted by the outside world's influence.
 - d) Jesus ends this parable explanation with his trademark expression, "He who has ears, let him hear."
 - (1) Those words were given to the disciples in private.
 - (2) Jesus same trademark expression was also given to the crowds.
 - (3) The point is that Jesus is calling his disciples and us to meditate on the words Jesus is teaching.
 - iii) To summarize this whole parable, the main point is that you can't tell who is and who is not saved, as we can't read people's thoughts. Therefore, in that particular issue, we are not to judge people. (Again, we are to judge their actions in the church, just not their eternal salvation!)
- 14. Verse 31: He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."
 - a) From this point onward, Jesus no longer gives an explanation of the meaning of parables.
 - i) My job gets tougher. ☺
 - b) There is a common view of this parable of which I disagree. It is as follows:
 - i) Jesus is describing the church as being like a mustard seed. Jesus says this is the smallest of all the seeds (of that region). It then grew larger than any mustard bush until it was the size of a tree where birds can make nests.
 - a) Birds don't make nests in small bushes. They use large trees for safety.
 - ii) This view is that the church will grow into a tree as the gospel message spreads.
 - iii) The problem with this view is:
 - a) The previous parable talks about false-believers in the church.
 - b) The next parable talks about false-believers in the church.
 - c) Therefore, if you read this parable in context, it is not about church growth.
 - d) Before I move on, this view is not 100% wrong. It does correctly describe how the church will grow. Just as a mustard seed does not become a large tree unless God does a miracle, so the church cannot grow unless God himself is behind the scene making it grow.
 - e) It is amazing to think about how 11 guys (disciples), all by word of mouth started Christianity to a point where millions of people believed in the first century, and billions believe over the past 2,000 years. Christianity survived persecutions, false-believers, apathy, etc. for 2,000 years and is still growing strong.
 - c) To explain this parable, we have to do go back to some comments from the other parables.
 - i) The first parable, the "4 soils" came with a detailed explanation by Jesus.
 - ii) In Mark's Gospel account of the same story, we have this additional comment:
 - a) Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this (4-soil) parable? How then will you understand any parable? (Mark 4:13, NIV)
 - (1) The key word is "any". The King James says, "all (the) parables".
 - b) My point is some of the phrases and word-pictures used in the "4-soil" parables apply as word-pictures in the other parables.

- iii) Back in Verse 19, in the 4-soil parable, “birds are bad” and represent Satan.
 - iv) In this mustard-bush-tree parable, we have birds in the branches.
 - v) I believe the “birds-are-bad” in the 4-soil parable and the mustard bush parable.
 - a) Jesus is talking about the church growing large, but at the same time he is warning that false-believers are part of that large church. These false-believers are the “birds in our big mustard bush” that is the church.
- d) To summarize this whole two-verse parable:
 - i) Jesus is predicting that his followers will start a very large Christian movement.
 - ii) At the same time, Jesus is warning about false believers being part of that church.
- 15. Verse 33: He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."
 - a) Verse 33 is a one-verse parable.
 - b) Here is a case where I don't like the NIV translation.
 - i) Sometimes the NIV translation does too much paraphrasing and misses a point.
 - ii) Let' me read from the New King James Version:
 - a) “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.” (Matthew 13:33b, NKJV).
 - b) The NIV says “a large amount of flour”.
 - c) The NIV misses the point about the “three measures of meal”.
 - c) The “three measures of meal” is important to a Jewish-mind (the 12 disciples) because it represents the “fellowship offering”.
 - i) In Genesis 18, God appeared to Abraham and Abraham then entertained three angels. In Verse 6, Abraham told his wife to prepare “three measures of meal”.
 - ii) To a Jewish person to this day, “three measures of meal” is a symbolic way of greeting guests.
 - a) The closest thing we as Americans have to this expression is when a guest comes to our house and we say, “Can I fix you something to drink?” It is the idea of doing something to welcome the guest.
 - d) The problem is that Jesus says the “kingdom of heaven” (i.e., the church) is like yeast (translated leaven in other English bibles) mixed in with these three measures.
 - i) Whenever you read of yeast/leaven in the bible it is a bad thing.
 - ii) It represents sin. When God commanded Moses on how to annually remember the Exodus (“Passover”), part of the requirements is to remove all yeast from the foods. (See Exodus 12:19)
 - iii) In Jewish thought, yeast/leaven is bad as it represents sin.
 - iv) Yeast is used in bread to make it rise. It “corrupts by puffing up”. It is a word-picture of sin as it grows if it is not removed.
 - v) So imagine Jesus teaching that the church will be like “three measures of meal” mixed in with yeast/leaven.
 - e) This one-line parable is another picture of how the church will grow and have corruption at the same time.
 - i) If you study the 2,000-year history of the church, this prediction has come true.
 - ii) It has grown to the point where billions of people swear allegiance to Jesus.
 - a) Yet horrible, unspeakable and embarrassing things are also part of the Church history. Many Jews to this day refuse to become Christians because of the horrible things done to Jews “in the name of Jesus”.

16. Verse 34: Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."
 - a) Verse 34 is an interruption of the parables themselves for Matthew to comment.
 - b) Matthew's point here is that the Old Testament predicted the Messiah would speak in parables. Matthew is quoting Psalm 78:2 and saying it is about Jesus.
 - i) On a side note, this shows that the Psalms also contain prophecy about Jesus.
 - c) We talked about why Jesus spoke in parables in the introduction to this lesson.
 - i) In summary, Jesus spoke this way to separate the spiritually lazy from the spiritually diligent. The diligent wants to learn more about God and therefore will seek out an explanation of the meaning of the parables.
17. Verses 36-43 we are skipping as we discussed them as part of Verses 24-29.
 - a) Remember that these verses are the explanation of the wheat and weeds parable.
 - b) Verse 36 says that these verses are out of time-context of the rest of the parables.
 - c) Verse 36 says that Jesus gave the disciples the explanation privately at a later time.
18. Verse 44: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."
 - a) Remember that Jesus' explanations of the other parables hold the key to understanding these short parables where no explanation is given.
 - b) Jesus said in Verses 38: "The field is the world".
 - c) The man who "sold all he had to buy it" is Jesus himself.
 - i) The treasure is us. That is, the people who believe in Jesus.
 - ii) To a Jewish reader, this refers to those of Jewish descent.
 - iii) "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. (Exodus 19:5, NKJV).
 - a) The Hebrew term translated "special treasure" is used 4 more times in the Old Testament. That particular idiom is not used in the New Testament. It is describing Jewish believers. (Deut. 7:6, Deut. 14:2, and Psalm 135:4)
 - b) Think of this Exodus passage as if Jesus himself was speaking it.
 - c) In Matthew, Jesus gives a parable of a man who finds a treasure hidden in a field. That same man sells all he has to buy the world for the treasure.
 - d) Now look at the Exodus command about believers being a special treasure.
 - d) Let's move on to the next parable and I will come back and tie both of them together.
19. Verse 45: Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.
 - a) Some commentators believe this illustration is identical to Verse 44, but uses "pearls" instead of a "special treasure". Other than that one word, the rest is fairly similar.
 - b) I happen to disagree. The key (to me) is the fact that "pearls" are not "kosher".
 - i) Oysters are among the foods that were forbidden to Jews.
 - ii) Therefore, pearls were not something valued.
 - iii) You can't find any positive reference to pearls as jewelry in the Old Testament.
 - iv) It is mentioned positively here in Matthew and near the end of Revelation in the description of heaven.
 - v) My personal theory is that because pearls are "not for Jews", this verse ties to Gentile believers.
 - c) Verse 44 focuses on a "special treasure", which is an Old Testament idiom for Jewish believers. Verse 45-46 focuses on "pearls", which is something Jews did not value.

20. Verse 47: "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- a) One has to remember that this last set of parables was given to the disciples only.
 - b) From Verse 36 and onward, Jesus is talking to his disciples.
 - i) First he gives the explanation of the "wheat and the tares".
 - ii) Next he gives the "special treasure" parable and the "pearl" parable.
 - iii) Finally, he is given this "fisherman" parable in Verses 47-50.
 - iv) Notice that Jesus gives the explanation for this parable within these verses.
 - c) This parable is similar to the "wheat and the weeds/tares" in that it is talking about how people will be ultimately judged for eternity.
 - d) Notice the first two words are "once again".
 - i) Jesus wanted the disciples the importance of:
 - a) How all people will be judged one day. Neutrality is not allowed.
 - b) How judgment does not come until "the end of the age".
 - ii) The application to the disciples and us is to "not to rush to judgment on anybody". God knows who will be saved and we don't. This means for us to not give up on people and to not judge people's eternal salvation.
 - a) This is why I get bored by the "pre-destiny vs. free-will" debate. This is a classical Christian debate over how much free-will we have in choosing our eternal destination. This parable is teaching that God is in charge of knowing who is and isn't saved. It is not up to us to worry about it. Our job is to preach Jesus. Let God worry about who's in and who's not.
21. Verse 51: "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.
- a) I've always wondered if the disciples were sincere in that answer or if they were too intimidated to tell Jesus they didn't get it.
 - b) Personally, I wish they would have said "No" just so Jesus could comment further. ☺
22. Verse 52: He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."
- a) To paraphrase Verse 52, God holds us accountable for what we know as believers.
 - b) Verse 52 is talking about "teachers" of the law. If you know the law, God then hold you accountable for what you know.
 - i) As a bible teacher, God holds me more accountable to teach the bible correctly.
 - ii) "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1, NIV)
 - c) Remember that the kingdom of heaven refers to believers.
 - d) Jesus is saying believers are like homeowners who bring out "new and old treasures"
 - i) Jesus doesn't explain this further, leaving me free to speculate. ☺
 - ii) I personally believe the "Old Treasures" we as "Law Teachers" are to bring out is the Word of God. This is passing on old truths to non-believers.
 - iii) I believe new truth is new applications. The "trick" of every bible teacher and Christian is to apply biblical knowledge to the present situation. A good teacher doesn't rely upon past history for bible application, but present history.
 - iv) An alternative explanation of "old and new treasures" could be an idiom for teaching the Old and New Testament concepts. Where as the "Old Treasures" refers to teaching the law and how we are sinners before God and the "new treasure" refers to the Gospel message.

23. Verse 53: When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there.⁵⁴ Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.⁵⁵ "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?"⁵⁶ Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."
- a) The last set of verses is a different topic from the rest of the chapter.
 - b) We no longer have Jesus teaching in parables to either the public or the disciples.
 - c) We now have Jesus coming to his hometown. The main point of this paragraph is that the townsfolk where Jesus grew up did not believe in him.
 - i) Jesus mother and his (half) siblings were probably not there. This is the townsfolk.
 - d) These verses also refute the Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary as perpetual-version.
 - i) Protestant believers see Jesus' mother Mary as something special in that she was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. That is a special privilege, but not one is to be prayed to in special intercession.
 - ii) I like to ask Catholics, "Why pray to Mary when God the Father is available?"
 - a) A standard answer is that it never occurred to them to pray that way!
 - iii) A friend who is Greek Orthodox and does believe in the perpetual virginity argues that these half-brothers were from a previous marriage from Joseph.
 - a) While that explanation is plausible, there is no bible evidence nor outside scholarship to even hint that possibility exists. If that were true, where were these guys when the manger scene happened?
 - iv) The point is Joseph and Mary went on to have a regular family after Jesus.
 - e) I want you to think about these verses in context:
 - i) Why would Matthew mention here that Jesus went back to his hometown after the parables and nobody (or practically nobody) believed in him?
 - a) I think the simple point is the "danger of familiarity". Some people couldn't accept Jesus as Messiah because they knew his family and watched Jesus grow up.
 - (1) The bible is silent on the all the years Jesus grew up. I suspect he had a normal childhood and young adult life until he was called by God to begin his ministry. Because the bible is silent on this issue, we should be silent on contemplating what those years were like.
 - f) The main thing we do know is that Jesus wasn't accepted.
 - i) I take comfort in these verses. I have a difficult time telling immediate family members and those I grew up with about Jesus.
 - ii) If Jesus couldn't get the "locals" to believe in him, why should I do any better?
 - a) It doesn't mean I should stop trying or stop praying for those I love. It does mean that I have to accept that God choose me to be a witness to others outside the community in which I grew up.
 - b) Sometimes people simply accept "strangers from afar" with greater authority than those who grew up in the community. I have seen it happen many times in my lifetime.
 - c) This is what Jesus meant in Verse 57 when he said, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."
24. Verse 58: And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.
- a) Jesus didn't "waste his time" doing demonstrations on those who didn't believe.
25. I'm way long. Next week we only have 36 verses instead of 58 and I'll cut it down a bit. ☺

26. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the insight to understand these parables. You taught us in parables so we could ponder the meanings and draw closer to you in those stories. May the Holy Spirit continue to draw us closer to you and show us old and new insights as we live for to glorify You. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.