

## The Kingdom: Living Within: Part 5

Tonight, as we continue our study of living within the Kingdom, we are going to start focusing on some of the parables Jesus tells to communicate important things that he wants us to know about His Kingdom. Before we get started on this I have to humbly mention that these parables have been taught in every single way possible. Christianity has, for lack of a better term, rung them completely out and there has been almost no possible interpretation that has been skipped.

The parables that we are going to study reference the Kingdom of Heaven and we already know that subject matter in and of itself is far more complex and layered than any of us had ever imagined. Let's get started with a basic definition of a parable. A widely accepted definition is that it is basically a comparison or a metaphor. A more detailed definition stated that a parable is, "A narrative, fictitious but agreeable to the laws and usages of human life, by which either the duties of men or the things of God, particularly the nature and history of God's kingdom are figuratively portrayed." That's our basic definition and quite honestly it's nothing too fancy. It doesn't simplify the parable to the level of a child's story, but it does explain that its meaning is definitely critical and should be sought out and considered.

Jesus had a few additional things to say about parables that we need to add to our definition of them so that we can approach them within the context of His perspective. Let's read the few passages where Jesus addresses His usage of parables.

***Matthew 13:10–17***

And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. “For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. “Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’ “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. “For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

***Matthew 13:34–35***

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.”

It is important to note right off the bat that in verse **11** it states that Jesus “answered them” and “answered” is an *aorist passive participle*. I want to draw your attention to the use of the *passive* voice, which states that the answer is not coming directly from the subject but from someone else through the subject. In this particular example this is evident of Jesus’ conviction that He only goes where the Father tells Him to go, does what the Father tells Him to do, and in this case says what the Father tells Him to say (**John 17:6-8, 9; 12:48-50; 14:10**). So before we even begin dissecting this passage I wanted to be sure to communicate that Jesus is letting the will and mind of the Father be done in and through Him as He is addressing this question.

As Jesus answers, the first thing He says is, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.” He very bluntly says that He uses parables to convey information about the Kingdom of Heaven that He is keeping from some and disclosing to others. There is a distinction here about who Jesus is communicating to when He is speaking in parables. He is talking to “you” but not to “them.”

A second, equally as interesting point Jesus makes in this first statement is that there are these “secrets”/mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. So the second thing we know in terms of Jesus’ usage of parables, is that He is dealing with specific mysteries and details that are “hidden.” Let’s briefly discuss the concept of these secrets or mysteries of the Kingdom.

**Amos 3:7**

Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets.

**Psalm 25:14**

The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, And He will make them know His covenant.

**John 15:15**

“No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

So far at Pathway, we have not focused on the secrets/mysteries of the Kingdom of God in a singularly concentrated study. But, we HAVE discussed several of them in depth throughout our regular studies. In fact, in a specific teaching on **Ephesians 1:7-14**, Steve listed them out for us and encouraged everyone to research them scripturally. For the sake of context, here is that list of “The Secrets/Mysteries” of:

- His will;
- The administration of the ages;
- Christ and the church (illustrated in a the marriage of husband and wife);

- The Gospel;
- Christ;
- The Kingdom;
- Among the Gentiles;
- The Jews being re-grafted into the vine;
- God's wisdom;
- The rapture (we shall not all sleep);
- Of lawlessness;
- Of godliness;
- 7-stars and 7-lampstands;
- Of God fulfilled by the 7th trumpet;
- Babylon;
- The woman who rides the beast.

That is A LOT of mysteries and honestly, one of these things could take months to dissect. This list is by no means a small list of trivial subject matters. But, these mysteries are the things that Jesus says He communicates about through parables and that He declares is to be given to "you" but not to "them." This is what the Bible is talking about when it says in **Matthew 13:34-35** that Jesus' use of parables fulfilled the prophecy that He would explain mysteries hidden since the creation of the world. This prophecy comes from **Psalms 78**, a psalm of Asaph.

***Psalm 78:1–8***

O my people, listen to my instructions. Open your ears to what I am saying, for I will speak to you in a parable. I will teach you hidden lessons from our past— stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us. We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the LORD, about his power and his mighty wonders. For he issued his laws to Jacob; he gave his instructions to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, so the next generation might know them— even the children not yet born— and they in turn will teach their own children. So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands. Then they will not be like their ancestors— stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful, refusing to give their hearts to God.

So it is important for us to understand that these parables are little treasure chests holding the treasures of our faith in the mysteries that the Lord has prepared to share with us about Himself. We are not to move across these parables lightly as we would Aesop's Fables. We have been commanded to teach these treasures of faith to our children and to teach them we must know, understand and care about them. Now let's discuss this "you" versus "them" detail.

In this dialogue with the disciples in ***Matthew 13:10-17***, Jesus has said "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted." He goes on to expand on his first statement by saying, "For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but

whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”

At first this sounds mean, especially as we view it through our human filter where we are almost always victims if anything seems unfair. It comes across as if Jesus is acting very exclusively. He says that the person who has will get more and will have even more than they need; an abundance, yet the one who does not have will also have whatever they did have taken away. Then He repeats Himself in saying, “**that’s why I speak in parables, because yes, they are looking at me but they aren’t seeing me and they are listening to me but they aren’t hearing me.**”

A good place to start in processing this is to take the fundamental step of interpreting what Jesus is saying by viewing it through the context of the character and nature of God. One of the key characteristics we know about God is that He is love (**1 John 4:8**). If God is love, why would He withhold information about His kingdom from some people and give it to others? If we think past our emotions and outside of our fearful boxes there is always a good answer when we ask the question through the perspective of the character and nature of God. I believe in this situation the answer points to His mercy. You see it is His mercy that does not grant more and more to the person that will lose even what he already has.

### ***Psalm 145:8-9***

The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.

The Lord is good to ALL. God's mercies are over ALL His works. This disables the accusation that in this situation mankind is a victim of a mean God. It changes our understanding because His mercy proves out that He is not the problem. We are the problem! It is not that God is mean, but it is mankind's deeply stubborn, wrong belief and unbelief that disables the relationship to the point of God needing to withhold. We want it to be the other way around because we have a very difficult time taking responsibility in relationship; but our opinions and feelings are simply not powerful enough to change absolute truth. Yet, in God's mercy, He operates within the context of our willingness to believe or not believe.

Jesus says, "They look but they don't see, they hear but they don't listen or understand." He is explaining why He doesn't share the mysteries blindly. He withholds the secrets and thereby protects people that are not ready or are refusing to believe from being judged for what they know. He is protecting them from losing even MORE than they will already have lost or will lose because of their stubborn, prideful and unbelieving hearts. In other words, everyone will be held accountable for what they know. This is the principle of **John 9:41**, which I will explain shortly. So by limiting what they know, He is mercifully giving them time and opportunity to soften their hearts while at the same time minimizing the judgment they may incur.

For us, this is both empowering and unnerving because our relationship with Jesus centers and rotates around freedom. When Jesus explains to the disciples that He is going to give the secrets to "you" but not to "them," that is Him operating within the context of our willingness to believe. Our relationship with God is truly



an active partnership that we both must take responsibility for and respect. This question and its answer is evidence of that reality.

So what part do we play in this? Do we just wait to see if we are the ones who see and hear or the ones who don't? How does this withholding work within the context of the relationship we are to be cultivating with God?

Let's talk about what we are working with to get an understanding on this piece of where our faith and choice plays into the outcome of being one who sees and hears. We can start by readdressing the reality we have discussed at length in this fellowship that God has already done His part and has given us the ability to believe in Him. (***Deuteronomy 29:4; 1 Kings 8:58; 2 Chronicles 30:12; Jeremiah 31:33, 32:40; Ezra 1:5, Isaiah 26:12; Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 3:27; Philippians 1:11, 2:13; Hebrews 13:21; James 1:16-18***).

Next, we can acknowledge that even though He has given us the ability to believe in Him, what He has not done is remove our ability/choice to reject Him. So He approaches us by equipping us with the ability to know Him and believe, and we approach Him with the capacity to act on both abilities, the ability to choose Him and the ability to reject Him. ***Matthew 13:10-17*** represents this concept in the usage of the words "it has been granted to know." "It has been granted" in verse **11** is in the *perfect passive indicative* meaning that it is something that is done for us and to us. Like all those verses we just listed explain, God grants to us the ability to receive and believe the mysteries. So He "grants" and that being in the *indicative* communicates that the "granting" is something that has indeed happened. God granted. And being in the *perfect* tense, it indicates that God made that decision in time past and it is an unchanging decision. In fact, from ***Ephesians 1:4*** and ***Romans***

**8:29**, we know that decision was made, in His foreknowledge, before time. So what we are experiencing now is just an unfolding of what has already been determined.

The word “to know” in verse **11** is in the *aorist active* meaning that it is something that we have a part in. So it is our part to access the ability God has given us to believe and act on it so we can know the mysteries when He grants them. God gives His secrets to those who take responsibility to know Him because the secrets are a part of what we inherit from the Kingdom when we believe. Conversely, the secrets cannot be actually received by one who does not have the capacity or willingness to “know” or believe, so God does not give them to those people. HE grants and WE know. It’s a two way street. To get granted you must act on the ability God gives you to believe so that you can know.

### ***Matthew 7:21–23***

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

So our part is to believe the right things about God and do the will of the Father just like Jesus did. In that belief, we position ourselves spiritually to know the secrets of the Kingdom that God has granted and equipped for us to know. There

are no hidden messages here. Jesus is clear in stating that even though someone sees and hears Him, it doesn't mean they believe in Him even though He HAS given them the capacity to do so. They may have chosen not to do so. He knows with whom He is supposed to share His mysteries.

### ***John 9:39–41***

And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.” Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, “We are not blind too, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

This passage reiterates that those who have heard and still reject the truth are accountable. As Jesus stated, their guilt remains because they say they see or claim to know and understand the things of God. In ***Matthew 23*** Jesus unleashes a monologue on the Pharisees that spares no ounce of ego. Five times within the chapter Jesus calls them blind: blind guides, blind fools, blind men, blind guides and blind Pharisees. Is Jesus wrong? Is God mean and unfair, or is He merciful and just?

### ***Jeremiah 17:9–10***

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.”

Jesus, in His mercy, knows what He is doing when He says, “it is not for them.” In this verse from *Jeremiah*, the Lord says, He gives every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds. That is a very powerful reality. The Lord is basically saying, “I have seen your heart and I must give knowledge and understanding according to your ways and the fruit of your deeds so that I can have mercy on you.” To drive this point home further, I want to note that Jesus even advocates for those that have not had eyes or ears even as He is dying on the cross.

#### ***Luke 23:34***

But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

He is merciful. This is why He speaks in parables. Going back to our original passage in *Matthew 13*, Jesus elaborates further on His explanation about these people who don't see or hear in His answer to the disciples. As we read this, I want you to understand He is dealing with the Jews as an ethnic group. So let's read it through the filter of the Jews at large not the Gentiles, for this passage deals with how Jesus has to deal with His chosen people who have chosen to not believe in Him.

**Matthew 13:14-17**

In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM." But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

The language of this passage is difficult to understand and it is kind-of a brain twister. But let me explain, for it is entirely consistent with what we just studied. In effect, the Jews have hardened their hearts by closing off their ears to truth and refusing to see clearly God in action. Hence, the passage in **Romans 10:21** (quoting **Isaiah 65:2**), "But as for Israel He says, 'ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.'"

Now, for their part it has been something they have participated in but they have not yet dug down deep in their souls and decided to totally reject God. The Pharisees and Sadducees did, but remember, we are dealing with the ethnic group as a whole and not only the very bad individuals. I say they participated in, but not downright rejected God, because "they scarcely hear and have closed their eyes" is rendered in the *aorist active indicative* (not the *middle voice*). But they have absolutely participated in this hardening and that is why God says that He, in effect, had to harden their hearts. If they had not hardened their own hearts, they would

have come to Him and He would have healed them. But they wouldn't so He couldn't. They simply did not recognize the time of their visitation (**Luke 19:44**). Thus, God had to harden their hearts or cause the hearts of the people to become dull (rendered in the *aorist passive indicative*) in order to have mercy on them before they reached the stage of darkness, as a nation, where they absolutely dug down deep and chose to reject Him.

In **Romans 9-11**, Paul flat out says that God has hardened the hearts of the Jews. But he makes it clear in **Romans 11:7** that this is only a partial hardening; it is not an absolute ban: "God has not rejected His people" (**Romans 11:2**). Those who are willing to soften their hearts will be given the opportunity to come to Jesus, for example, Paul and all the other Jews that accepted the Lord. But God used the fact that they "fell" into unbelief as an opportunity to pour out His grace on the Gentiles. And if the failure of the Jews resulted in so much goodness for the Gentiles, imagine how great it will be when they return to the Lord. As Paul says, "If their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" Now this partial hardening will only last until the fullness of the Gentiles have come in—until the number of Gentiles appointed unto salvation are actually born-again in Christ. Then God will show the Jews mercy and all Israel will be saved (both Jew and Gentile who believe by faith) (**Romans 11**). But for now, it was necessary for God to harden their hearts for us and for them.

I want you to understand that even in His judgment, God is always merciful. This was done for their protection and for our freedom. By the way, this was actually foreshadowed in **Deuteronomy 29:4**; declared in **Isaiah 29:10**.

The prophecy Jesus references in verses **14** and **15** are found in **Isaiah 6:9-10** and

is very powerfully placed among the surrounding scriptures. The reason why I think this prophecy is so perfect for this subject matter is because the first six chapters in *Isaiah* leading up to this prophecy are a recap about God and His relationship to the Israelites and the recap runs a striking parallel to what Jesus was now experiencing with people in His ministry, especially with the religious leaders in Israel. All that time and life had passed and nothing had really changed in the relationship between God and the Israelites. The first 6 chapters of *Isaiah* are a mouth dropping drama between a loving Father and His rebellious children. The imagery is incredible; I mean real earth shaking stuff. It is so similar to the interactions between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day, which undoubtedly impacted the nation as a whole. Even then, as Judah and Jerusalem are in the throes of rebellion, there are statements such as:

***Isaiah 1:18–20***

“Come now, let’s settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool. If you will only obey me, you will have plenty to eat. But if you turn away and refuse to listen, you will be devoured by the sword of your enemies. I, the LORD, have spoken!”

***Isaiah 5:14–16***

The grave is licking its lips in anticipation, opening its mouth wide. The great and the lowly and all the drunken mob will be swallowed up. Humanity will be

destroyed, and people brought down; even the arrogant will lower their eyes in humiliation. But the LORD of Heaven's Armies will be exalted by his justice. The holiness of God will be displayed by his righteousness.

Jesus' entire ministry on earth is like a three-year miniature recreation of these first five chapters. So after 6 chapters of drama between God and His people we come to this prophecy that Jesus references in His answer to His disciples about parables. It highlights the reality of the relationship between God and the Israelites both in the time of Isaiah and in the time of his ministry. Just before the prophecy, we find Isaiah in the presence of the Lord and I want to draw our attention to the very last part of this passage in ***Isaiah 6:9-13***.

### ***Isaiah 6:9–13***

Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me." And he said, "Yes, go, and say to this people, 'Listen carefully, but do not understand. Watch closely, but learn nothing.' Harden the hearts of these people. Plug their ears and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts and turn to me for healing." Then I said, "Lord, how long will this go on?" And he replied, "Until their towns are empty, their houses are deserted, and the whole country is a wasteland; until the LORD has sent everyone away, and the entire land of Israel lies deserted. If even a tenth—a remnant—survive, it will be invaded again and burned. But as a terebinth or



oak tree leaves a stump when it is cut down, so Israel's stump will be a holy seed."

So Jesus uses this specific reference to convey that the people He is dealing with are exactly like the people from the time in Isaiah in that they rejected God and would need to be destroyed before new life could come from their cut off stump. And He was absolutely right when He said, "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is now being fulfilled" because they ended up killing and rejecting Him as well. (**Acts 4:11-12, 1 Peter 2:8**). Think about it. The nation of Israel never repented of their sin so the northern tribes were carried away to Assyria and were never to be seen of or heard from again. Thereafter, the southern tribes were captured and carried away to Babylon and God left the land desolate. Eventually, He restored a remnant to the land to have new life. But this cycle of their rebellion repeated; and even though God allowed them to remain in their land they were occupied and captive by the Romans. But it would not be much more than 34 years after Jesus rose from the dead that the nation would once again be decimated and destroyed for their unbelief leaving only a stump and a few random branches waiting for the new life—the restoration that would come when the time of the Gentiles has been fulfilled. So this time was then, this time is now, and this time will continue until the last Gentile chosen for salvation comes to the Lord. Then they will hear and they will see.

Jesus then turns from the prophecy back to the disciples and says:

***Matthew 13:16-17***

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

We will pick up with this part of the passage next week.

Let's Pray