

Kelham Baptist Church
Men's Bible Study
January 15, 2023

THE PARABLES OF MATTHEW 13 AND
THE CHURCH AGE
Lesson 1

In Matthew 12:24, the Pharisees blasphemed against Jesus and from this point on, Jesus begins to turn toward the formation of His Church, which He will refer to as "**The Kingdom of Heaven**". Matthew 13 contains seven kingdom of heaven parables.

Revelation 2 and 3 contains letters to seven **historical churches** of Asia. Prophetically, these seven churches represent the character of every church from Pentecost until the second appearance of Christ. This period of time is divided into seven epochs, named for the dominant church during that period. The first parable is **The Sower** that spreads the seed. The first letter is to the **church at Ephesus** which represents the apostolic church that took the Gospel to all the known world during the time period from Pentecost until about A.D.100.

The first four parables are spoken by the seaside to a great multitude, but the last three are spoken

to the disciples in private.

READ MATTHEW 13:1-9. The disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the people in parables (mysteriously). Jesus answered, "Because it is given unto you to know the **mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it is not given" (verse 11). The disciples did not understand the parable and Jesus explains it to them in verses 19-23:

1). The seed is the **Word of God**. Some seed falls on the hard packed wayside that represents a person with a hard, non-receptive heart. The birds, that eat the seed, represent fallen angels (demons) snatching away the Word from the hardhearted.

2). Some of the seed falls on stony ground (shallow soil) and that is like a person who is willing to listen to the Word. They are even excited about hearing the Word, but because they are not grounded and rooted in the scripture, they do not hold on to it when others begin to mock and question them.

3) The seed that fell among thorns represents people who receive the Word, but will not allow it to grow in their lives because of worldly cares and possessions.

4). Some of the seed falls on **prepared soil**. This represents the person whose heart has been prepared by the Holy Spirit. They receive the Word, understand it, and they nourish it

through prayer and hearing the Word as often as possible. These seeds **grow and reproduce**. In each case, the seed is good: it is the character of the **soil** (human heart) that determines the growth of the seed.

This parable pictures the apostolic church that began spreading the Word. The early church (from Pentecost until about 100 AD) took the gospel to all the known world, planting the seed. Some produced 100%, some 60, and some 30. At the close of the first century, persecution increased, and many churches had lost their zeal.

READ REVELATION 2:1-7. Ephesus is the “**sowing and planting**” church. Ephesus means “beloved”. Jesus commends this church because they broke the ground, sowed the seeds of the gospel and carried the message to the known world. They loved Christ and wanted to accomplish His will in the world. Everywhere they went the Jewish leaders sent men to counter the teachings of Paul and the other missionary leaders. Both the Jews and the Romans persecuted the early church and by the end of the first century Roman persecution was very heavy. The early Christians had a sincere love of Christ; they endured hardships and continued to start new churches. Jesus commends them for this good work, but points out that they had lost the zeal for Christ they had in the beginning. They had cooled off and began to depend more on the organization and the leadership of men rather than the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Jesus warns that if they do not repent, He will re-

move the lampstand from them. In Revelation 1, Jesus identified the lampstands as the churches. Therefore, if He removes the lampstand, they will no longer be light unto the world. In their favor, was the fact that they hate the practices of the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans elevated the clergy above the people, making them rulers of the congregation with absolute authority. This is the beginning of elevating the priesthood in church hierarchy. The early church at Ephesus hated this philosophy and so did Jesus. Jesus ends this letter with the warning to hear what the Spirit says to the church and that to those who overcome, He will give the right to eat of the tree of life. The tree of life is in heaven at the close of Revelation, it is in the New Jerusalem, so the promise is eternal life with Jesus to all that overcome the failure of the church at Ephesus.

At the close of the first century, the church at Ephesus that once was "on fire" is **beginning to cool off**. Next week we will study the parable of the Wheat and the Tares and see how it represents the church at Smyrna, a church that had many members who were actually children of the devil. In addition, this church suffered horrible persecution under the Roman emperor Diocletian.

