

MATTHEW

Chapter 13

The Parable of the Sower

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. 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.” 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 an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 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.” ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 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. ¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 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. 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. 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. 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.”

13:1-3a The crowds gather around Jesus, so he gets in a boat and takes a seated posture, a posture of teaching. However, Jesus uses a rather obscure

teaching form; he speaks to them in many *parabolais*. A parable is a short discourse that makes a comparison expressing a complete thought. It closely resembles a riddle. The evangelist feels the need to include its interpretation later. This is not the most straightforward way of teaching. Even the disciples later in v 10 question Jesus about his method. Jesus replies that he is fulfilling the judgment prophecy of Isaiah (Is 6:9–10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:1 THAT SAME DAY – This was to be one of the busiest days of which we have any knowledge in the life of our Lord, from the time when he was besieged by the multitudes upon his return to Capernaum until late in the same day, when he rested his weary head in the rocking bed of a storm-tossed ship on the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus' third discourse followed immediately after He experienced rejection from "this evil generation" (12:45). (TLSB)

Matthew intends for his hearer/readers to associate the teaching offered in chapter 13 with what has immediately proceeded, for he narrates that Jesus' teaching in parables happens "on that day" (13:1) immediately after some Galilean Pharisees had engaged in hostile confrontations with Jesus (12:22-45). Even more significantly, the crowds have failed to grasp His true identity or be His true family (12:23, 46-50). These last incidents are only further developments in the growing opposition to Jesus' ministry that has been building since 11:2. (CC)

This narrative development dovetails perfectly into the interpretation of the Sower that Jesus gives to His disciples. The modern (but not the postmodern!) readers breathes something of a sigh of relief – we know what this parable is about. Jesus is answering the question of why, despite His ongoing ministry of words and deeds, so many people in Israel are not responding in faith and discipleship. (CC)

OUT OF HOUSE - The owner is not named but may have been Peter (v. 36; 8:14). (TLSB)

13:2 GOT INTO A BOAT – With this arrangement even more people could hear Him.

1 Timothy 2:4, "who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

SAT DOWN - In biblical times, teachers taught while sitting (5:1; 24:3). (TLSB)

CROWD GATHERED - ESV has “stood.” Those assembled onshore.
(TLSB)

13:3–9 See vv. 18–23 for the interpretation of this first parable. (CSB)

13:3b-8 The *speirōn*, regardless of the soil’s condition, sows seed on the earth. The seed falls (*epesen*) from above on the road, the rock with a little soil on it, the soil where thorns grow, and finally the good soil. Only in the good soil does the seed produce fruit in various quantities. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:3 *parables*. Our word “parable” comes from the Greek *parabole*, which means “a placing beside”—and thus a comparison or an illustration. Its most common use in the NT is for the illustrative stories that Jesus drew from nature and human life. The Synoptic Gospels contain about 30 of these stories. John’s Gospel contains no parables but uses other figures of speech (see notes on Mk 4:2; Lk 8:4). (CSB)

Matthew’s first use of this term, which refers to short stories or wise sayings in a variety of literary forms, including proverbs, maxims, allegories, fables, comparisons, and riddles (cf. Ps. 78:2; Ezk 17:2). All of Jesus’ parables here focus on the working of God’s kingdom (cf 6:9). Four parables in this chapter were spoken to the crowd (vv 3–9; 24–35) and four to the disciples (vv 36–52). (TLSB)

An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

All these parables teach important truths concerning the kingdom of God, and that is true of Jesus’ parables in general. The kingdom of God is not a visible earthly organization occupying a specific amount of territory in this world. The kingdom of God is God’s dominion, His ruling activity. God rules in the heart of His believers through the power of His Word. He calls people by means of the gospel. By the power of that same gospel He creates saving faith in Christ in people’s hearts. With that same power He strengthens and preserves that faith and moves people to produce fruits of faith, works that keep His commandments and express genuine love for God and one’s neighbor. (PBC)

SOW HIS SEED – Fields in Palestine were quite small plots. The seed was cast by hand. There were no fences.

Jesus interpreted this parable of the sower in vv 18–23. Some modern interpreters have argued that parables are best interpreted by reducing them to a single point or truth. However, the way Jesus interpreted and applied some of His own parables (e.g., vv 36–43, 49–50) should guide how we interpret and apply them today. (TLSB)

This sower, unlike other sowers, casts seeds without apparent regard for where it lands. That is how it is with the reign of God in Christ; grace trumps efficiency. What is important is the bearing of fruit, not a certain amount of it. (CC)

Points of Comparison – 1) As the seed encountered different kinds of soil, so the Word of the Kingdom encounters different hearers. 2) As the seed encountered difficulty and yet produced a harvest, so will the Word of the Kingdom produce a harvest.

Central Truths – 1) Take heed how you hear. 2) In spite of difficulty, the Word will do its work.

13:4 BIRDS CAME AND ATE IT UP – The birds immediately devoured the seed that fell along the path. The seed here did not germinate.

13:5 *rocky places*. Not ground covered with small stones, but shallow soil on top of solid rock. There was only a very thin layer of soil but it did germinate. (CSB)

13:6 SUN CAME UP – During the growing season in Palestine the sun get quite hot.

PLANTS WERE SCORCHED – *ekaumatistha* – This denotes a burning of the seed from without.

THEY WITHERED – *exarantha* – This signifies a drying up from within. The reason both scorched and withered are given is that the seed had no root despite the fact that it had germinated.

13:7 THORNS WHICH GREW UP AND CHOKED – This means that the thistles grew faster than the plants which came from the seed.

13:8 GOOD SOIL – This went deep.

13:9 HAS EARS LET HIS HEAR – Cf 11:15. Jesus meant this agricultural example to have a deeper spiritual meaning, which His hearers needed to carefully consider. (TLSB)

Jesus exhorted. If you are able to hear, then really listen, take to heart, believe, and obey. (PBC)

Jesus uses this maxim first when teaching in 11:14–15 that John the Baptist was the returning Elijah, and it is in the context of violence against the coming Kingdom that it is used. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:1–9 Jesus earlier told His disciples: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (9:37). This parable gives encouragement that when a laborer faithfully sows the seed, a plentiful harvest may follow, even if some seed goes to waste. We are tempted to give up

a task when we experience little success. That is also true of our efforts to share the Gospel. Let us not grow weary in doing good, knowing that at the right time we will reap, because God provides the harvest (Gal 6:9). • Give me patience, dear Lord, when the tasks of life seem hard and unending. Amen. (TLSB)

13:10 *came*. Later, Jesus taught His disciples privately in the house. Likely vv 10–23 were included in this instruction. (TLSB)

WHY DO YOU SPEAK...IN PARABLES – He spoke in parables for two reasons: 1) In order that the prophecy found at Ps. 78:2 might be fulfilled. See vss 34-35; 2) To reveal and to conceal, v. 11. Knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven is given to the disciples. But to the others (the rejecters) it has not been given. The receiver is given more and more, v 12, but the rejecter is deprived of everything. This is a fulfillment of the prophecy at Is. 6:9. Parables become in this way an act of grace in the case of the disciples, but judgment against the un-tractable.

Jesus responds to His disciples' question with a two-part reply (13:11-12) and 13:13-17), each part of which begins with a casual construction. The two-part reply expresses the paradoxical mystery that lies at the heart of the answer to the disciples' question. (CC)

The first part of Jesus' answer (13:11-12) stresses the truth that when anyone "gets" Jesus – begins to believe in and follow Him as His disciple – this only happens because God the Father has imparted the revelation. It has been given to that person to know the mysteries that are being manifested through Jesus as He brings the reign of heaven in the world. The realities brought by Jesus are not attainable by mere human reason. They must be revealed to people by God. (CC)

The second part of Jesus' answer (13:13-17) gives the explicit reason why He is teaching the crowds in parables. Jesus is now teaching this way because the crowds are not truly seeing or hearing or understanding Him. This mode of communication, on the human level, does two things at the same time. First, it still tries to reach out to the hearers, although in an indirect, metaphorical fashion. Second, it acknowledges the situation that the crowds have made for themselves by rejecting Jesus and treats them as outsiders. (CC)

13:11 *given to know the secrets*. The disciples were the "little children" to whom the Father revealed the secrets of the kingdom of heaven (11:27). (TLSB)

13:12 Jesus quoted a proverbial saying that contrasts those people who have with those who have not. The disciples had been given the secrets of the kingdom (v 11) and would learn more. Those who opposed Jesus would lose even what knowledge they had. (TLSB)

13:13–14 Jesus speaks in parables because of the spiritual dullness of the people (see note on Lk 8:4). (CSB)

13:13 *why I speak to them in parables.* Parables both reveal and conceal. For the unbeliever, parables were a form of God’s judgment, because they refused to listen to the clear Gospel message (v 34). (TLSB)

13:14–15 Jesus quoted Is 6:9–10 to show that He was fulfilling Scripture when He spoke in parables. The Lord commissioned Isaiah to preach to Israel, knowing that the people would not understand what they heard or saw. Jesus taught the unbelieving crowds in parables because they continued to reject Him. (TLSB)

13:17 *longed to see.* Past generations looked forward in faith to the fulfillment of God’s messianic promises. (TLSB)

did not see it ... did not hear it. These OT prophets and righteous people died before Christ came. (TLSB)

13:10–17 Jesus pronounces His disciples blessed because they have seen and heard and believed. Christians today are also blessed, for the Holy Spirit has given us eyes that see and ears that hear. We dare never take our spiritual blessings for granted, for then we put ourselves in danger of losing them. Let us daily praise God for His goodness. In the Holy Scriptures we have everything we need for salvation and life together. There we learn of Jesus and His completed work of salvation for us sinners. • I stand in awe of Your goodness to me, dear Savior, and ask You to keep me faithful to the end. Amen. (TLSB)

13:18 LISTEN THEN – Jesus will interpret vv 3–8 for His disciples. (TLSB)

“Listen,” He says, for that is what the whole parable is about – listening, listening to the Word of God. Some hear but don’t really listen. Some hear and listen, but only for a little while. Some hear and listen for a while, but imagine that they need not give their undivided attention to what God is telling them. They are too easily distracted. Some keep on hearing and listening: they grow in faith and in sanctification. They produce the fruits of faith in great abundance. (PBC)

While Jesus simply tells (*la/eō*) the rest of the people the parable, he says to his disciples, “You therefore hear!” (*akousate*). The imperative verb form emphasizes the forcefulness of opening deaf and unbelieving ears to hearing and understanding. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Joshua 1:8, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

BOOK OF THE LAW – In Hebrew it is called the “Torah.” While “Torah” is usually translated “law,” its root meaning is much broader. It means “instruction”

or “teaching.” It can refer to all of God’s revealed teaching in the OT – His laws, His promises, the prophetic history of His acts among His people. (PBC)

MEDITATE – The Hebrew word for “meditate” means literally to “murmur to oneself in a low voice” (as Orthodox Jews commonly do to this day). We miss something if none of our Bible reading is oral.

Luke 2:19, “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart..”

TREASURED – Her treasures were not any earthly relics: a bit of straw from the manger, the cloth in which the baby was wrapped, or one of the shepherd’s staffs left behind. Her scrapbook of this event was carried within her heart. (PBC)

“Kept” KJV – “She continued guarding” is the imperfect, which stands out among all the aorists; Mary’s impressions were enduring. She said nothing – it was all too sacred, too miraculous for her. (Lenski)

PONDERED – She turned over again and again in her mind what had happened and was amazed at what a great thing God had done. (PBC)

The present participle with its durative sense matches the durative imperfect verb. The idea in the participle is that of throwing things together, comparing; letting one explain and add to another. We catch a glimpse of the depth of Mary’s character, it was calm and deep, spiritually receptive and strong, steady and persevering in grace. The Greek conceives the heart as being the seat not merely of the emotions but of the entire personality, will, mind, and emotions. Mary’s entire personality was involved. (Lenski)

Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”

DWELL – The present tense of the imperative “let dwell” points to a continual presence of the Word. It is not merely to be read, commented on, and the like, but it is to be internalized so that it is continually present. Believers are to live, think, and exist in relation to the Word of Christ. It is to empower and norm everything about their existence. (CC)

RICHLY – As a cognate of ploutos “richness” a term used by Paul almost exclusively to describe the splendor of the way of salvation, here not only means “a great deal” but also “with great benefit,” for the riches of salvation will come through the employment of Christ’s Word. (CC)

Acts 17:11, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

EAGERNESS – The complete eagerness is shown by the fact that they engage in this activity everyday. (Sacra)

EXAMINED – To inspect or scrutinize (a person, thing, or situation) in detail, observe or analyze carefully. (Dictionary)

2 Timothy 3:15-17, “¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. From "Grace to Receive the Word" (Page 308 in LSB)

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the patter of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.'

"Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'" "I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"

[*Bits & Pieces*, June 24, 1993, pp. 13-14.](#)

How good a listener are you?

- 1) Since you think about four times faster than a person usually talks, do you use this time to think about other things while you're keeping track of the conversation?
- 2) Do you listen primarily for facts rather than ideas when someone is speaking?
- 3) Do you avoid listening to things you feel will be too difficult to understand?
- 4) Can you tell from a person's appearance and delivery that there won't be

anything worthwhile said?

5) When someone is talking to you do you appear to be paying attention when you're not?

6) Do certain words and phrases prejudice you so you cannot listen objectively?

7) When listening are you distracted by outside sights and sounds?

Leadership, Vol.1, No. 4, p. 99.

Good listening is like tuning in a radio station. For good results, you can listen to only one station at a time. Trying to listen to my wife while looking over an office report is like trying to receive two radio stations at the same time. I end up with distortion and frustration. Listening requires a choice of where I place my attention. To tune into my partner, I must first choose to put away all that will divide my attention. That might mean laying down the newspaper, moving away from the dishes in the sink, putting down the book I'm reading, setting aside my projects.

Robert W. Herron, Homemade, June, 1987.

13:19 *word.* Note the sixfold repetition in vv 19–23. (TLSB)

of the kingdom. Gospel message that Christ is the messianic King who rules (4:17; 9:35). God's rule springs from His Word. (TLSB)

DOES NOT UNDERSTAND IT – sunietos – means to receive, accept or take it in. They rejected it. Jesus is picturing the ancient and modern Pharisees noted in verses 14-15. Luther says: “it went in one ear and out the other.”

Jesus uses the examples of three different soil conditions to explain why hearers failed to understand the Word, something Isaiah also experienced (vv 14–15). (TLSB)

evil one. Satan. (TLSB)

SOWN ALONG THE PATH – The seed that falls on the hard ground of the footpath points to those people who go through the motions of hearing the Word of God but almost immediately let the devil take it away from them. The devil calls God a liar, and many believe his lies and go with him to eternal destruction. God wanted to save them and invited them into His kingdom, but they simply declined His gracious invitation. They preferred to live this life according to the ignorance and evil lusts of their sinful flesh. God does not drive or drag anyone into His kingdom by force. Christ died for everybody and redeemed the whole world, but those who despise His salvation and reject Him rightfully remain in Satan's kingdom for time and eternity. (PBC)

The Word is heard but quickly rejected. “Those fussy spirits are to be rebuked who, after they have heard a sermon or two, find hearing more sermons to be tedious and dull. They

think that they know all that well enough and need no more instruction” (LC I 99). (TLSB)

Jesus reveals that the seed is the Word of the Kingdom and that the soil or path is the heart of the hearer. The birds represent the evil one (*ponēros*) who carries the Word away from those who do not understand. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

He wants His hearers to know that this stands for the sad fact that there is a battle going on for the lives of men and women and children and that sometimes Satan simply takes away the message about the reign of God that Jesus is proclaiming and His hearers never understand it or even begin to believe it. (CC)

The first soil, the wayside, is the class which, without further ado, repudiates the Word, the indifferent who have hardened their hearts through the steadfast service of sin. Among them are the self-righteous Pharisees then and now. (Y)

13:20-21 Jesus identifies the rocky ground as the hearer who first receives the Word with joy but is scandalized (*skandalizetai*) into falling away when tribulation and persecution from the world come because of it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:20 ON ROCKY PLACES – The shallow ground describes the person who gladly hears the Word of God and believes it. He is very enthusiastic about being received into God’s kingdom and into membership in a Christian congregation. He expects that His Christian faith will exempt him from the troubles that other people experience in this life. He looks for success and prosperity, good health and uninterrupted happiness. (Sad to say, there are some false prophets who lure people into their churches by giving them such false hopes.) But then reality strikes. The troubles that are an inescapable part of living as sinful people in a sinful world come into this person’s life. He even faces some forms of persecution, some hardships that are inflicted upon him because of his Christian faith. He was unprepared for such developments, and he gives up his faith without much of a struggle. (PBC)

A Faith that is small and weak saves a person for heaven just as well as a strong, heroic faith saves. But we must not be satisfied with a weak faith because it can so easily be snuffed out. We rather want to put on the whole armor of God, so that we are fully protected against anything that might threaten to destroy our faith. You might want to refresh your memory on this matter by reading Ephesians 6:10-18. (PBC)

RECEIVES IT WITH JOY – This pictures an emotional hearer whose thrill is very short-lived.

The second soil is the populace in its wild enthusiasm for the Savior, soon a thing of the past; today “Hosanna!” and tomorrow “Crucify him!” These are the emotional, superficial, sentimentalists who are easily impressed by the Word, who are moved to tears and make good resolutions. But they would retain at the same time the contrariness of an unbroken heart, and therefore they lapse again into the sleep of death and destruction. As long as our attitude toward the Word consists merely in easily aroused, pleasing emotions, all is well, but when the Word presents its demands, that is, to become a determining factor in the heart, exacting obedience in the hour of trials, then is encountered the opposition of the unbroken, unregenerate heart, and the newly created life of promise sickens and dies. (Ylvisaker)

13:21 The Word is heard but does not produce a vigorous root because the soil lacks depth. (TLSB)

13:22 CHOKER IT OFF – Once the things of this world mean more than what the Word offers, the person is in danger.

The thorn-ridden ground, Jesus says, is the hearer overtaken by the cares of the world associated with the curse spoken to our first parents. Sin’s deceitfulness (*apatē*), to which Eve succumbed, and the idolatrous flesh choke the plant before it can mature and bear fruit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Thorns represent “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.” The seed sown among thorns grows for a while but never really thrives. This kind of hearer is still too concerned about material things and the problems of this life. He has great difficulty trusting God to provide for all his bodily needs. He imagines that if he can only accumulate enough money and all the things that money can buy, then he will be perfectly happy. If he gets rich and still is not happy, he imagines that the solution is to get even richer, and he never has enough. Mammon is his god, and he becomes Mammon’s slave, so he never produces fruits of faith to glorify God. (PBC)

The third soil is that group which like the rich young man, has a certain longing for salvation, but which, at the same time, desires to retain the old worldly spirit in its various ramifications, those who would have what is of heaven and of the earth, but who are in reality of an earthly mind. When they fail to experience, contrary to their expectations, only pleasure in their Christianity, when renunciation and suffering call at their door, then these trials become to them a rock of offense which hinders further progress and leads to a fall from grace. (Ylvisaker)

13:23 *understands*. Understanding the Word is the Father’s gift to His children (v 11; 11:25). (TLSB)

PRODUCES A CROP –Finally, Jesus explains that the beautiful, or good, (*kalēn*) soil is the person who hears and comprehends (*sunieis*) the Word. From these hearers will come abundance in various multiples. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Finally we come to the good seed that falls into good soil. Some hear the Word and understand and believe it, and they produce abundant fruits of faith. The most precious fruit is the sharing of God’s Word with others. In this way the seed of the Word literally is multiplied 30 or 60 or 100 times or more. God gives us His Word to believe and share. (PBC)

The fourth soil represents the proper receptive attitude as in the disciples. In them the seed produces fruit; but there is a difference in the fruit in accordance with the dissimilarity in gifts, in qualifications, in faithfulness in the use of the Word, conditions in life, etc. When reference is made to the “good soil,” it is evident to any one familiar with the Scriptures that this is not a word-picture of the soil as it is found by the Word. The Word itself must, through its divine and inherent power, produce the good soil. Of unwilling hearts it must create hearts that are willing, as our Confession declares. (Ylvisaker)

This parable is not telling us that people are inherently different and that some simply are more receptive to the Word of God when they hear it. The Bible makes it very clear that by nature all of us are dead in trespasses and sins, totally incapable of responding at all to God’s Word, for it is foolishness to natural man (1 Corinthians 2:14). When people hear the gospel and believe it, that is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. Saving faith is a gift of God. On the other hand, when some hear the gospel and reject it, that is entirely their own fault. That doesn’t sound reasonable or fair to our human minds, but that is what God says, and we leave it at that. Any attempts on our part to logically explain this mystery of “why some are saved and not others” only leads to our denial or rejection of other clear Bible truths. So we simply marvel at the grace of God that saved us when we were as bad as all the rest of sinful humanity, and we look for ways to express our deep gratitude to our gracious God. (PBC)

bears fruit and yields. The seed of the Word of God is good and will produce abundant fruit. (TLSB)

13:18–23 Jesus explains the parable of the sower for His disciples. He wants them to understand that as they go out and preach the Gospel, not all the seed they sow will produce fruit. But what keeps a farmer sowing and a disciple proclaiming is Jesus’ promise that some seed will produce a wonderful harvest. The lesson for us is obvious: the blessings of God’s kingdom come through the seed of God’s Word. • O divine Sower, keep me from becoming discouraged as I entrust my life to Your Word and seek to share Your message of salvation with others. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Weeds

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.’”

13:24-35 We may treat the parables of the Weeds, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven together for three reasons. First, they are a triad of reign of heaven/God parables that Jesus speaks to the crowds who are not His disciples. Second, these three parables are set off from the triad that follows; Jesus will tell the latter grouping in the house and only to the disciples. Third, these parables seem to share a common major theme, namely, that Jesus’ ministry entails an important not yet character. (CC)

13:24–30 See vv. 36–43 for the interpretation. (CSB)

The tension between the parable (13:24-30) and its interpretation (13:37-43) can be explained, I would suggest, by the different audiences that are involved.

13:24 ANOTHER PARABLE –Jesus introduces the second of his seven parables in Matthew 13 by making a comparison (*hōmoiōthē*) to the kingdom of heaven. A man is sowing the seed, and it is qualified as good (*kalon*) seed in the field. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

This little story is about what it is like now that God has begun to restore His royal rule in the present time of Jesus’ ministry. This is a story that communicates at least the following to the crowds: for the present time, do not expect Jesus’ ministry to be different than it has been. The crowds have not yet believed. Though curious and at time positive toward Jesus, they are not His disciples, His true family (12:46-50). They are not satisfied with Jesus; they must find something lacking in Him. (CC)

I would suggest that the basic impact of this parable on the unbelieving crowds, if they were listening at all, would have been for Jesus to tell them this: “Stop looking for something other than what I am offering you. I must seem truly strange, like a man who has an enemy so evil that he scatters weeds in the man’s field at night, and then the owner doesn’t even weed out the harmful plants from the midst of his own crop. This must seem strange to you, but what you are seeing in me is the present manifestation of God’s reign here in the world. (CC)

The kingdom of heaven is like. This phrase introduces six of the seven parables in this chapter (all but the parable of the sower). (CSB)

The remaining parables in this chapter make comparisons to aspects of God's kingly rule (cf. v. 11; 3:2; 4:17). (TLSB)

compared to a man. Another parable about a sower, but one with a different problem. Jesus will interpret this parable in vv 37–43. (TLSB)

13:25-26 In contrast, at night a hostile one (*echthros*) sows seeds of weeds (*zizania*) that resemble the wheat. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:25 WHILE EVERYONE WAS SLEEPING – The enemy worked in a stealthy fashion at night when no one was aware of it.

weeds. Probably darnel, which looks very much like wheat while it is young, but can later be distinguished. This parable does not refer to unbelievers in the professing church. The field is the world (v. 38). Thus the people of the kingdom live side by side with the people of the evil one. (CSB)

Likely bearded darnel, which is botanically close to wheat and difficult to distinguish from it when the plants are young. (TLSB)

AND WENT AWAY – *kai apalthen* which implies that the enemy did not want people to know that he had been there. This was a criminal's way of acting.

13:26 WEEDS ALSO SPROUTED – This is what caused the workers distress.

13:27 WHERE...COME FROM – They are distressed.

The difference between the weeds and the wheat is barely discernible, too close to call with certainty until the plants mature. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:28-29 The servants ask if they should gather the weeds, but the master says no, lest they uproot (*ekrizōsēte*) the wheat along with the weeds. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

The master's servants inquired whether they should collect the weeds prior to the harvest. But pulling darnel weeds, with their strong and deep roots, would uproot the emerging wheat plants. (TLSB)

13:28 DO YOU WANT US TO – They are letting it entirely up to him.

13:29 NO...BECAUSE – The point is that their action would be entirely harmful. He is saying, “Don’t be rash.”

The servants are most emphatically not to try to change the situation; that would be dangerously premature, and not their calling. The danger is that if they were to attempt such a separation of the weeds, wheat would also be uprooted. (CC)

13:30 I WILL TELL THE HARVESTERS – They are both growing but for entirely different purposes. He, the Master, is in complete control.

The reapers in the harvest season will first bind up and utterly burn (*katakausaï*) the weeds and then collect the wheat into the barns. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

BURNED - To prevent the weeds from spreading seed and causing future damage, they were burned after being separated from the wheat. (TLSB)

barn. Wheat was stored for future use. (TLSB)

13:24–30 The master does not seem overly upset by what his enemy has done and shows great patience in delaying until the harvest the separation of weeds from wheat. He warns his servants not to judge prematurely by assuming they can distinguish between these plants. A mark of God’s rule is His patience (2Pt 3:8–15). For us sinners, this is a great comfort and also an encouragement for us to endure evil patiently (2Tm 2:24). • O God, help me to accept the fact that in this world good and evil will grow side by side. Lead me also to count on Your wise timing and judgment. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

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.” ³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount ^a of flour until it worked all through the dough.” 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.”

13:31–32 Although the kingdom will seem to have an insignificant beginning, it will eventually spread throughout the world. (CSB)

Jesus compared kingdom growth to how a very small seed becomes a tree. (TLSB)

Explicitly in view once again is the claim that the story will reveal something of how it is now in Israel and in the world with reigning of God that is happening through Jesus and His words and deeds. (CC)

13:31 A MAN TOOK AND PLANTED – First, the man who sowed the mustard seed in his field must surely refer to Jesus Himself and to His proclamation of the Good News of the reign of God. Second, the major theme of the parable is the contrast in size between the mustard seed when sown in the field and the completely unexpected declaration that the seeds grows into a genuine tree. (CC)

13:32 *the smallest ... the largest.* The mustard seed is not the smallest seed known today, but it was the smallest seed used by Palestinian farmers and gardeners, and under favorable conditions the plant could reach some ten feet in height. (CSB)

a tree ... its branches. Likely an allusion to Da 4:21, suggesting that the kingdom of heaven will expand to world dominion and people from all nations will find rest in it (cf. Da 2:35, 44–45; 7:27; Rev 11:15). (CSB)

What is now, Jesus declares, is not what will be. In fact, what will be is far beyond the crowds' expectations, for mustard plants do not grow into trees large enough to offer a home for birds. (CC)

Kingsbury, Parable of Jesus in Matthew 13, 81. France, Gospel of Matthew, 527, rightly responds to the view that Jesus has in mind some specific variety of mustard seed that does in fact, grow to be a tree:

The mustard plant hardly qualifies as a “tree,” and the term may be a deliberate exasperation designed to evoke the echo of Dan 4:12, 21..., though some experts claim that the black mustard (*Brassica nigra*, grown in Palestine for oil and as a condiment), normally not more than two meters [ca six feet] in height, could sometimes grow to as much as give meters [ca sixteen feet] (others limit it to three [meters; ca ten feet]), which puts it well above most “vegetables.” But the point of the parable does not depend on its botanical accuracy; parables often exaggerate for effect. (CC)

To further France's point, I might also suggest that the desire to identify a particular variety of mustard seed that does grow into a full-grown tree may stem from the assumption that Jesus' parables are true to life, when in fact, many of them contain remarkably unrealistic and exaggerated features in order to reveal what the reign of God is like. (CC)

The similarities between the Weeds of the Field and the Mustard Seed are easy enough to spot. Both parables are explicitly said to reveal something of what it is

now like as God reigns in Israel and the world through Jesus' ministry. Each parable in turn involves a main character who sows seed into his field. Both parables, more importantly, promise that the present situation will change and that something much different will later prevail. That change, however, will only come in time. For now, the reign of heaven is a small and unimpressive thing, at least in the eyes of some, and perhaps many, in Israel. (CC)

13:33 In the Bible, yeast usually symbolizes that which is evil or unclean (see note on Mk 8:15). Here, however, it is a symbol of growth. As yeast permeates a batch of dough, so the kingdom of heaven spreads through a person's life. Or it may signify the growth of the kingdom by the inner working of the Holy Spirit (using God's word). (CSB)

leaven. Yeast or a bit of leavened dough causes dough to rise. Leaven often symbolized evil (1Co 5:7), but here Jesus pictured it as a transforming agent that works quietly and almost unnoticed. (TLSB)

The Leaven has elements in common with the Weeds of the Field and the Mustard Seed, but it surely has some unexpected features as well. The two obvious surprises are that the protagonist in the little story is a woman and not a man, and that the positive element that the woman puts to use is "leaven." It is difficult to know whether Jesus included these surprising elements in order to rattle His hearers or even to shock them. It seems like that the crowds would have noticed. (CC)

Leaven is most often a negative image in biblical literature, given the importance of the exodus and its themes. The Israelites were commanded to eat unleavened bread as part of the Passover meal and during the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that began with the Passover; they were commanded to purge their homes of all leaven during that time (Ex 12:1-8, 14-16; Deut 16:1-8). For leaven as a negative image in the NT, see Mt 16:6, 11-12; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6-8; Gal 5:1-9. (CC)

Scaer, Discourses, 308, comments: "Some parables are meant to startle, and a parable in which a woman was working with leaven would do just that." (CC)

Even shorter than the Mustard Seed before it, the narrative rides chiefly on one main sentence: "the reign of heaven is like that a woman took and hid in ten gallons [forty liters] of wheat flour until it was leavened thoroughly." It is unusual that Jesus would describe the act of leavening wheat flour as hiding leaven. It is even more unusual that a woman, without any word of explanation or modifier (such as "wealthy" woman or "servant baking for a king's banquet"), would be dealing with such a massive amount of flour! (CC)

One should add that after the original ten gallons of flour were leavened, allowed to rise, and then baked, a far larger quantity of bread would result. Yet it is not possible to be precise about just how much greater the volume of baked bread would be. Estimates vary from commentator to commentator. (CC)

Even with the shift away from male action in an agricultural context to female domestic activity, the major theme of the story remains the same as that of the Mustard Seed. Give the yeast enough time, and it will leaven the whole batch, all ten gallons of it. God's reign will not always appear as it does to you today; it will be different. For now, however, this is what the reign of God is like, and so the crowds should not go away from Jesus. They should stay and follow Him around and watch as He carries out His ministry of the reign of God. (CC)

For Jesus' disciples, the impact of the Leaven is very similar, if not identical, to that of the Mustard Seed. Do not lose heart. God's reign seems to be small now, but in God's time, it will become large and all-encompassing. The woman stands for Jesus Himself, and like the mustard seed, the yeast is probably the Word about the reign of God. (CC)

Things in Israel are not good, opposition is getting stronger, and Jesus' work seems to be, well, hidden (cf. "hid" in 13:33). Nevertheless, the disciples – then and now – are not to despair, but to trust the power of the small, hidden work that Jesus was and is doing. Let the one who has ears hear! (CC)

hid. Hidden in the dough as God's kingdom is hidden in the world. (TLSB)

three measures. Probably c 84 cups, as much as a woman could work at one time. (TLSB)

13:31–33 These two parables contrast the small beginnings of the kingdom of heaven with its exceptional, though hidden, growth. God is active in small things, even though His presence may not be evident. Jesus' ministry had humble beginnings, but its expansion has been miraculous. God uses even our small efforts to accomplish His purposes. • Lord Jesus, use my feeble testimony to further the growth of Your great kingdom. Amen. (TLSB)

13:34-35 As in the case in 13:10-17, Christ's purpose is rooted in the OT and fulfills what is said there in Psalm 78. In sum, Psalm 78 begins with the calls to listen to important ancient truths that need to be declared in order to be known by the present generation, and then it proceeds to proclaim the deeds of the God of Israel in that nation's history. (CC)

Jesus has invited the crowds, by means of three parables, to continue to search out the significance of His own present ministry and not to turn away, looking for some other kind of Son of David or a different sort of royal reign. (CC)

13:35 *fulfill ... prophet.* Cf Ps 78, which relates the history of Israel. The story of Israel needed interpretation to be properly understood. The truths that Jesus told also needed explanation (11:25). (TLSB)

13:34–35 Historians point out that simply knowing the facts about an event is not enough. One must interpret the facts correctly for proper understanding. This is true with Jesus and the events of His life. We need the revelation that the Holy Spirit has provided in the Word of God to understand Jesus and put our faith in Him. • Lord, draw near to me in Your Word, and open my heart to hear. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Weeds Explained

³⁶ Then he 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.” ³⁷ He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. 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.

13:36 THEN HE LEFT THE CROWD – The third and fourth Kingdom parables were spoken before Jesus dismissed the multitudes.

After the crowd departs without understanding, Jesus reveals to the disciples the meaning of the parable of the weeds. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

EXPLAIN TO US THE PARABLE – Scholars routinely observe that the interpretation of the Weeds of the Field (13:36-43) in some ways doesn't seem to match up very well with the parable itself (13:24-30). For the crowds the message is: “Look – this what the reign of heaven is going to look like for now. Don't look to someone else; keep listening and inquiring after Jesus and His significance.”

The disciples, on the other hand, are following Jesus in a ministry that is becoming increasingly more difficult and more discouraging. The disciples do not, of course, fully understand the mysteries of the reign of God now at work in Jesus. Nor are they even close to fully understanding Jesus. God has, however, revealed to them that this Jesus is the one in whom the reign of God is happening, and they are His disciples. As they look around at how things are

going and they wonder about how things will transpire, Jesus interprets the parable of the Weeds of the Field for them and lays deliberate emphasis upon the final goal toward which the reign of God will inevitably press. His purpose is to reassure them. (CC)

In contrast to those who rejected Jesus, the disciples persisted in seeking understanding. Jesus explained vv. 24-30, interpreting seven key elements: sower, field, seed, weeds, enemy, harvest, and reapers (vv. 37-39). “You must always have God’s Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears. But where the heart is idle and the Word does not make a sound, the devil breaks in and has done the damage before we are aware” (LC I 100). (TLSB)

13:37-39 Jesus now draws the comparison between the characters in the parable and those in the kingdom of heaven. Sower of good seed: Son of Man; the field: cosmos or world; good seed: sons of the Kingdom; the false seeds: sons of the evil one; the hostile sower: the devil (*diabolos*); harvest season: completion of the age. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:38 *field*. Represents the world, where “the sons of the evil one” continue to live. See Ap VII and VIII 17–19. (TLSB)

GOOD SEED – This represented the Gospel, the life-giving Word.

13:38 FIELD IS THE WORLD – The community of the people around Jesus, however, is in that world, and within the community, there will always be an inseparable mixture of people. That tension must not be destroyed, and Jesus’ disciples must accept that fact. That difficulty will only be destroyed by the angels on the Last Day. (CC)

SONS OF THE KINGDOM – Those who are spiritually alive because of the Son of man.

SONS OF THE EVIL ONE – They are actively evil. They are products of the devil. Judas was a hypocrite. God did not predestine Judas to damnation. Judas rejected the shield of faith to ward off the fiery missiles of Satan.

There is likely no significance, for instance, to the fact that the enemy sowed his seed “while people were sleeping” (13:25). Nor, interestingly are the servants of great significance, other than to note what Jesus says their vocation is not. Farthest of all from the story’s intent is any thought that the weeds should not be uprooted because, in God’s gracious time, perhaps they might change from weeds into wheat. (CC)

Contra Augustine, Sermon 73, cited in Simonetti, Matthew, 1:277. Of course, unbelievers may repent and believe in Jesus, and then they would

metaphorically be considered wheat, but this parable is not about conversion. (CC)

Second, the parable does teach Jesus' disciples that they must expect the public company of those who gather around Jesus to be confusing, confused, and flawed. The church in the world is real, and flesh and blood; it is not "invisible" in that sense. No one, however, will ever be able to determine of whom the true church consists. Nor is anyone called to purify the company of disciples by "weeding out the deadwood." The One who teaches this parable, after all, is the One who was betrayed by means of a kiss from one with whom He had shared bread for years. (CC)

Third and perhaps most importantly, the parable's interpretation reminds us of the great framework within which all that we do and say in the name of Christ takes place. The ongoing presence of sin and evil that shocks and shatters our Christian communities is just that: the presence of sin and evil. People who publically confess the Gospel also fight and quarrel with one another, all too often unjustifiably. The church militant seems to be the only army that shoots its own wounded. Pastors and leaders are seduced by power and show themselves to be great hypocrites. It is not hard to become disheartened and discouraged. One may be tempted to decide simply to protect oneself and to withdraw. (CC)

Yet the hope remains. The day is coming. It will be the Son of Man's day, and His angels will do the sorting. God may seem slow, but He is never late. The parable of the Weeds and its interpretation can encourage us, give us hope, and stand us on our feet so that we may continue to follow the Son of Man and to serve Him. (CC)

13:40-41 The sons of the evil one are further defined as those who cause others to fall into sin (*skandala*) and those who practice lawlessness (*poiountas tēn anomian*). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:40 END OF THE AGE – Parable illustrated the final judgment. (TLSB)

13:41 ALL WHO DO EVIL – John Hus: "They gather up from the kingdom of holy church all that offend, that is, those who commit iniquity, namely, the sin of final impenitence" (*The Church*, p 41). (TLSB)

13:42 *fiery furnace*. Image of punishment in hell (cf 3:12; 18:8–9). (TLSB)

WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH – This is figurative for excruciating pain.

Jesus describes a grim judgment and fate for the sons of evil. They are thrown into the fiery furnace. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:43 EARS, LET HIM HEAR – Both Law and Gospel.

SHINE LIKE THE SUN - The righteous will reflect light similar to Jesus at His transfiguration (17:2; 1 Cor. 15:39-49). (TLSB)

Jesus' description paints the image of golden wheat at harvest shining in the sun with Christ's righteousness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

their Father. Jesus referred to the righteous in the third person to indicate a future event. (TLSB)

13:36–43 At the close of this present age, the Son of Man will send His angels to gather all people. The law-breakers will suffer eternal punishment, and the righteous will enjoy the Father's heavenly glory. Since all people are law-breakers, all deserve to be cast into the fiery furnace. Only those who have faith in Christ will escape this fate. They are declared righteous (Rm 3:21–26). "He who has ears, let him hear" (v 43). • Bless me, Jesus, with a believing heart, that I may remain a child of Your kingdom. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

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. **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.

13:44-52 Jesus told these last four parables, found only in Matthew, to His disciples. (TLSB)

13:44–45 These two parables teach the same truth: The kingdom is of such great value that one should be willing to give up all he has in order to gain it. Jesus did not imply that one can purchase the kingdom with money or good deeds. (CC)

[THE ABOVE PARAGRAPH REFLECTS WHAT MANY COMMENTATORS HOLD. WHAT FOLLOWS IS FROM CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BY JEFF GIBBS AND GIVES A DIFFERENT PICTURE.]

In the twentieth century, a few scholars have advocated, in various forms, a Christological reading of either the Hidden Treasure or the Pearl of both. Their voices, however, are few and far between. Virtually all commentators known to me have read these stories as intended to describe or motivate the reader to discipleship and commitment in following Christ, in seeking God's grace, or some such understanding. (CC)

The theme of the valued object that a person purchases at the cost of everything else that he possesses speaks not just of the value of the object involved, but specifically about how the object is obtained. In the face of this repeated and emphatic theme that interpreters – especially Christian interpreters – typically retreat. Christian interpreters who hold to the discipleship reading of 13:44-46 are compelled to dilute the natural force of this remarkable, repeated language, and for obvious reasons. No one wants to say that the parables teach that disciples are (able) to purchase the reign of Christ or anything else for their own salvation. (CC)

I have tried to accept the discipleship reading of these two parables, but I find myself unable to do so because a simple yet very strong argument can be marshaled in favor of a Christological interpretation. I begin with a crucially important (if somewhat obvious) comment. The reign of heaven/God concerns what God is doing to reestablish His reign in His fallen creation through Jesus of Nazareth. By definition, the “reign” (Basileia) primarily involves the great saving deeds of God in Christ. (CC)

Whenever a reign parable has a lone human figure acting in the symbolic narrative, that figure always represents (more generally) God or (specifically) Jesus, and when there are multiple characters with one in central position always represents God/Jesus. The reign of God has to do chiefly with what God is doing in Israel and in the world through Jesus, and so the reign parables are centered in the present and future deeds of God in Christ. (CC)

I underscore that the repeated language is not that of merely leaving or forsaking. It is the language of exchange and purchase. (CC) [DO TO LENGTH I HAVE SKIPPED THREE PARALLELS GIBBS USES AS EXAMPLES. IF YOU WANT TO SEE THEM, PLEASE CONTACT ME.]

I may summarize the argument in favor of a Christological reading of 13:44-46. The reign of God is about what God is doing in Jesus. The reign parables, especially when they involve a sole figure who acts, reveals something about what Jesus Himself is doing in His eschatological ministry of deeds and words. (CC)

But what about the instinctive move of the discipleship reading to equate the reign of God in Christ or some such reality with the valuable object in each parable? With regard to the only other occurrence of the term “pearl” in Matthew’s Gospel, I have argued there that it is precisely one’s fellow disciples who are to be regarded as holy and pearl-like. (CC)

I have suggested above that if the man/merchant in 13:44-46 represents Christ in His deeds of manifesting the reign of God, then Jesus’ chosen disciples are the treasure and the pearl. This part of the parables’ symbolic meaning, in my experience in teaching, seems to strike people as remarkable. Many Christians

recoil, finding it impossible to swallow. On the basic theological level, however, this image is simple an expression of divine grace. Jesus' disciples – then and now – are clearly nothing special in themselves. In God's royal rule and economy, however, they are to their Father as a treasure and a pearl. (CC)

Supporting exegetical evidence is not difficult to find. In the interpretation of the Weed of the Field that immediately precedes these two parables, the eschatological destiny of the righteous is to “shine forth like the sun (shines forth) in the reign of their Father” (13:43). Having been called by Jesus to believe and follow, His disciples are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (5:13-16). Moreover, Jesus' disciples, centered in the Twelve, are the nucleus of the new/true Israel. The OT theme of Israel as God's “precious possession” (Ex 19:5; Deut 14:2; 26:2; 26:18; Mal 3:17; Ps 135:4) provides additional scriptural background and precedent for reading the valued object in Mt 13:44-46 as Jesus' disciples. At least one early rabbinic parable gives voice to a similar expression. By God election, OT Israel was a treasure to Him. By Jesus' call and forgiveness, His disciples are like a treasure and an exceedingly valuable pearl. (CC)

I can summarize my proposed interpretation of 13:44-46 to this point. In the context in which opposition is rising and discouragement is close at hand for Jesus' disciples, He tells them two small stories. What Jesus is accomplishing in restoring God's reign in Israel and the world is compared to the action of a man who because he had found an object of great value, extravagantly sold all that he possessed in order to purchase that valued object and to make it his own, Jesus Himself is the man. To use language from elsewhere in the NT, He gave up the glory He possessed from eternity past as He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant in His incarnation (see John 17:5; Phil 2:6-7). His entire ministry, culminating in His death and resurrection, can be compared to the extravagant action of purchasing. The object of His desire and affection is His disciples; they are to Him as a treasure and an exceedingly valuable pearl. They do not, therefore, need to fear that they will be overwhelmed or taken from Him by the forces arrayed against them in Galilee or anywhere (cf. John 10:28-29). He has made them His own, and He will make them His own, giving everything in order to purchase them (cf Rom 8:31-39). (CC)

In to search out the meaning of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl, I have focused on the common refrain of selling everything and buying, arguing that this is a picture of what Jesus' ministry of bringing the reign of heaven is all about. In line with this, I have argued that the valued object in each parable is a symbol for the disciples of Jesus. I would suggest that perhaps only one more motif found in these parables is intended for theological interpretation, precisely because it connects well with the context. (CC)

I do not think it is significant that in the Hidden Treasure the man purchases the entire field. To be sure, this action could be read as a

symbol for Christ giving His life for all, and not just for some. The context in Matthew 13, however, is precisely emphasizing the distinction between the disciples and the crowds. The theme of Christ's universal atonement, while a true doctrine, seems not to be an emphasis here. I also agree with the many who think that nothing should be made of the fact that the man apparently does not tell the field's former owner about the treasure hidden there. Nor can anything be made of the detail in the Pearl that the merchant was searching for fin pearls (in the plural). All of these features are there simply to adorn the telling of the stories. (CC)

I refer to the repeated theme of hiddenness in the field in the Hidden Treasure. It is mentioned twice: the treasure is hidden in the field before the man finds it, and after he finds it, he hides it again! In addition, Matthew has already given his hearer/readers the Weed of the Field in which the field is interpreted as the world, as well as the Mustard Seed in which one could infer that the field is the world. To what in the neat context does the motif of hiddenness in the field relate? (CC)

It relates to the disciples themselves and their lives as those whom the seed has been sown in a world that, in their experience, is increasingly rising up against the Sower-Master. The context both immediately before and after Matthew 13 is filled with discouraging news. Nor will the situation change radically as Jesus' ministry continues; the opposition will intensify. This is precisely why I have argue that the impact of the four units that comprise 13:36-50 is one of encouragement for the disciples. They are "buried" in Galilee, following as increasingly unpopular Lord. No matter, however. They are secure, for their Lord has gone – and will go – to extraordinary lengths to secure them as His own. (CC)

The message and the impact of the Hidden Treasure and the Mustard Sees can be the same for the disciples of Jesus today. Those parables bring an image and a message of assurance and comfort. The man/merchant did whatever it took in order to possess what he valued so highly, even to the point of selling everything he had. So has Jesus done what needed to be done to possess His holy Christian church on earth today. Though we disciples may often feel buried under the challenges and dangers presented by our own sinful flesh, by the hostile world around us, and by the great enemy and father of lies, there need be no doubt that we belong to Jesus. WE have been acquired. Christ has purchased us at the price of everything that He had. In the breathtaking reckoning of grace, we are as a treasure to him. Secure in that confidence, we can continue to follow Him. (CC)

13:44 *treasure hidden in a field*. In ancient times it was common to hide treasure in the ground since there were no banks—though there were “bankers” (Mt 25:27). (CSB)

Different interpretations of this short parable exist. One may naturally see the man as any man and the treasure as the kingdom he discovers. However, a more Christological interpretation describes the field as the world, the treasure as you (the hearer), and the man as Christ, who gives up the glory of heaven to win you. (TLSB)

The Word of God and its precious Gospel are very available to people but are completely hidden and meaningless until God himself reveals the meaning. It was a common practice for a wealthy person at that time to divide his wealth into thirds. One part he would keep in cash for carrying on business transactions. Another part he would invest in precious stones and jewels, which he could easily take with him if he ever had to flee from an advancing enemy army. The third part he would bury in the ground somewhere, hoping to dig it up and reclaim it when he was able to come back home. Of course, such a person did not always come home, and his buried treasure's location might not be known to anyone else. Evidently, the man in this parable happened to find such a treasure. He very likely was not even looking for it. (PBC)

In Palestine people often secured their treasure by burying it in the ground, especially when unstable political situations threatened for foreign conquest. (LL)

The Kingdom of Heaven has hidden value, and is, in its outward manifestation, unobtrusive and unpretending, but is withal the highest and eternal blessing. Nothing can be likened to the salvation in Jesus for the human soul. (Ylvisaker)

HID IT AGAIN – This does not mean that it was meaningless to him but that he prized it very highly.

IN HIS JOY HE WENT – chara – This is used 59 times in the NT. Except for its use in an axiom (Jn 15:21) it is never used of unregenerate man. It is used often of the joy of faith, especially in trying circumstances and deep sorrow.

SOLD ALL HE HAD – Read Philippians 3:2-11. Of all Jews Paul could have based his relationship to God on earthly prerogatives and works more than any other Jew. But when God revealed the Gospel to him, Paul considered all previous gain loss, dung, manure. He had found the righteousness of God which came to him by faith, quite apart from works and human worthiness. When he came upon it he recognized its value. Without hesitation, he sold all his possessions so that he could buy the field and the treasure it contained.

13:45-46 In contrast to the previous parable, this merchant was busily seeking to discover fine pearls. When he found one perfect in size, shape, and color, he sold all he had and bought it. (TLSB)

13:45 AGAIN – If the hidden Treasure and the Goodly Pearl are treated together in one text, the P.C. would be: AS the treasure and pearl were supremely valuable, so the value of the Kingdom surpasses all else, The C.T. might be: “Jesus, Priceless Treasure.” (Sermon Theory II)

Pearls were very much prized by the ancient world because of their beauty and value. (LL)

The buried treasure and the costly pearl both represent the kingdom of God or Christ the Savior, who established that kingdom and rules over it with the gospel. That kingdom is more precious than anything else in the world, and only those who are received into that kingdom can correctly evaluate their other possessions. Those who recognize God’s kingdom as the ultimate good will judge their other possessions on the basis of their usefulness in supporting and extending Christ’s kingdom. That is the main purpose we are to serve in this world. (PBC)

The Kingdom of Heaven is of inestimable worth, and one must sacrifice even that which is most precious in order to obtain it. (Ylvisaker)

MERCHANT – emporos is a merchant who travels far and wide to buy wares. The dealer in costly pearls made it his business to search far and wide for the finest pearls. When he found a pearl more perfect in size and shape and color than he had ever seen before, he just had to have that pearl. So he also sold all his possessions in order to buy that single pearl. (PBC)

13:46 FOUND – euron is used precisely as in verse 44. Though he was seeking, he comes upon, accidentally finds. Some people of today may come upon the pearl of great price while they are searching for pearls of much lesser value among the writings of the great thinkers and philosophers of this world. They do not even know that the perfect pearl exists. Once they have found it, however, and the Holy Spirit has convinced them of its value, they realize that the gospel of Christ is in a class by itself, that it is the only way of salvation for sinners. (PBC)

There are about 160 million unchurched in the USA. The most unbelievable statistic is that 80 million of these people would be willing to come to church if they were invited. (The Unchurched Next Door – Thom Rainer)

Today the treasures of Christ’s kingdom are available for all people in the sacred Scriptures. No book is easier to get than the Bible, and year by year it is becoming available in more and more translations in more and more languages. (PBC)

WENT AWAY – apelthon means that he has ceased searching. The dealer in costly pearls made it his business to search far and wide for the finest

pearls. When he found a pearl more perfect in size and shape and color than he had ever seen before, he just had to have that pearl. So he also sold all his possessions in order to buy that single pearl. (PBC)

SOLD EVERYTHING...BOUGHT IT – Just as the two men in these parable sold everything they had in order to purchase what they found, so the kingdom of God must be bought for all of us. But the price is much more than we could possible pay. The whole world would not be payment enough for a single soul. The filthy rags of our own personal righteousness could not even begin to make a down payment. The only possible solution was for someone else to pay the price for us, and the only one who could do that was God’s holy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The price he paid was his own holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. Now he offers us all the blessings of his kingdom for time and eternity as gifts of his grace. He bought and paid for these blessings in full, not for himself but for us. And we do not lose these treasures when we share them. The more we give them away, the more richly we possess them ourselves. (PBC)

13:44–46 In the parables of both the hidden treasure and the precious pearl, Jesus reinforces this basic truth: earthly possessions cannot compare with the immense value and cost of God’s kingdom. We must not press the details of these parables to say that one can buy entrance into God’s kingdom by sacrificing all possessions. We inherit the kingdom by grace through faith in Christ, who purchased and redeemed us with His precious blood. • Heavenly Father, grant me Your kingdom and Your righteousness. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Net

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 righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied. 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.”

13:47–51 The parable of the net teaches the same general lesson as the parable of the weeds: There will be a final separation of the righteous and the wicked. The parable of the weeds also emphasizes that we are not to try to make such a separation now and that this is entirely the Lord’s business (vv. 28–30, 41–42). (CSB)

The strengthening message of the Dragnet, however, aims in a somewhat different direction than the Weeds of the Field. In the latter, Jesus' words give the ability to carry on while accepting that the community of Jesus' disciples will always be an imperfect, flawed, frustrating reality. There will never be a time when wheat and weeds are not intertwined here in the world, but do not lose heart; the time when all things are put right will surely come. (CC)

In the Dragnet, however, Jesus' teaching imparts strength to carry out the mission mandate that the Master has given in the first place to the Twelve (chapter 10) and in general terms to all disciples (5:13-16). The image of the net gathering in sea creatures of every kind inevitably evokes the original call of Jesus: "come after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men" (4:18-22). The mission must and will go on, through Jesus' words and deeds and those of His disciples after Him, calling people to salvation and discipleship. All kinds of sea creatures will be gathered into the visible community, both good and rotten, but what of that? The angels will sort it out on the great day. Jesus' disciples only are not lose heart, and to carry on as they follow Him in His outreach to Israel and ultimately to all nations (28:18-20). (CC)

13:47 THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN – Again is the Gospel, here compared to a net.

The sea is humanity, the net is the Word of the Gospel. Where this Word is proclaimed in its purity, there is a church, however composite in its constituency. (Ylvisaker)

LIKE A NET – Fishermen used a dragnet, which was a square net with cords at each corner. It was weighted so that, at rest, it hung upright in the water. When the boat began to move, the net was drawn into the shape of a great cone into which all kinds of fish were drawn. The net was dragged to shore, and the catch was separated. (LL)

A dragnet was drawn through the water between two boats and onto the shore. When the net was full, edible and inedible fish were sorted from one another. (TLSB)

13:48 IN BASKETS – Into safe keeping and not thrown back into the dangers of the sea.

13:48 BAD AWAY – sapra means the worthless. (QV)

13: 49-50 Jesus interpreted this parable in a way similar to the parable of the weeds (cf. vv. 37-43). However, the weeds were allowed to grow over a period of time, whereas there was no delay in the sorting of the fish. Both parables teach clearly that God's rule includes a final judgment at the close of this age. (TLSB)

13:49 WILL BE AT THE END – Very similar to verse 41-43, but this time there is no mentions of the gathering of the righteous into heaven. This parable ends only on a note of warning. Luther said: “When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said ‘Repent ye’ he meant that the whole life of the Christian must be one of repentance.” The Kingdom of God, Christ and his merciful Gospel, is present in the Word.

13:47–50 Jesus’ parable illustrates what will happen at the close of the age. Believers need not worry about that day, for God is gracious to us through His Son, our Savior, in whom we are chosen (Eph 1:4). • Let not my heart be troubled, dear Lord, by thoughts of the final judgment. I know that You have prepared a place for me in heaven. Amen. (TLSB)

13:51 HAVE YOU UNDERSTOOD – Sunakate means “have you gain insight into these things.

The disciples had earlier asked Jesus to explain the parable of the weeds (v. 36). Now Jesus asked them whether they understood, something that was vital for a disciples (cf. vv 13-15, 19, 23). In saying “yes” would later show that their confident answer was overstated (15:16). (TLSB)

13:52 EVERY TEACHER (ESV SCRIBE)...BEEN INSTRUCTED - Literally “has become a disciple.” Jesus trained disciples so that they could make disciples of others (28:19-20). (TLSB)

master. Owner of the house. (TLSB)

BRINGS OUT... NEW TREASURES AS WELL AS OLD – This speaks of all true teachers, be they pastors or laymen. They know the lesson that they have been taught is the past and add new as they continue to be in the Word. (CC)

The disciple who understands these things, then will have a treasure-store of wisdom and truth that comes from the Christ, who fulfills the OT Scriptures, and therefore from those Scriptures as well. (CC)

Fresh food items and aged ones, such as cheese and wine. (TLSB)

13:51–52 With this parable, Jesus encourages His disciples to imitate the master of a house who brings out food for his family and guests. Jesus had trained His disciples to be teachers for the kingdom of heaven. In their teaching, they were to bring out both old and new. Without giving up the OT, they were to add the NT. The OT needed to be understood on the basis of the new revelation that they had received from the Father (11:25). Christian pastors, teachers, and students of God’s Word continue to follow this practice today. All the Holy Scriptures teach Law and Gospel and “are able to make [us]

wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2Tm 3:15). • Lord, keep me steadfast in Your Word, and lead me out of death to life. Amen. (TLSB)

A Prophet Without Honor

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.”** ⁵⁸ And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

13:53 House probably in Capernaum, where Jesus had been teaching His disciples (v 36). (TLSB)

13:54 *his hometown.* Nazareth. (CSB)

taught. Jesus did what His disciples would be doing in the future (v 52). (TLSB)

wisdom and these mighty works? Townspeople questioned the source of authority and power for Jesus’ teachings and miracles. (TLSB)

WERE AMAZED – This does not indicate a positive response to Jesus. (CC)

13:55 *carpenter’s son.* † The word translated “carpenter” could mean “stonemason.” (CSB)

brothers. † Probably sons born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus, or possibly children of Joseph by a previous marriage, or cousins (Mk 6:3; see note on Lk 8:19). (CSB)

Four brothers are named who earlier had come asking to speak to Jesus. (TLSB)

The people err in apparently thinking that this piece of family information has significance for understanding Jesus. It does not, for at this stage in His ministry, Jesus has offered His own family no special status in relation to Himself. To know Jesus only as the son of Mary and elder brother of these four men is not to know Him truly at all. No one has any claim on Jesus by right or by birth or by proximity of any kind. (CC)

13:57 THEY TOOK OFFENSE – Gk *skandalizo*, “stumble or trip over something or someone” (Eng “scandalize”; 16:23; 1Pt 2:8). Jesus’ neighbors were skeptical because of their prior acquaintance with Him and His family. (TLSB)

Matthew tells us that they began to be caused to stumble into unbelief. (CC)

France, Gospel of Matthew, 550, rightly notes the difference between the unbelief in Nazareth and the disciples’ little faith. The former excludes one from being a disciples; the latter does not. (CC)

PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR – Proverb similar to “familiarity breeds contempt.” Jesus was saying that a prophet is more honored away from home than by His native town and family. Jesus’ family had made a similar mistake (Mk 3:21). (TLSB)

These people in Nazareth do not want to assume a posture of abject poverty and absolute need (cf. 5:3-6) but want to relate to Him in a different way. (CC)

The dishonoring in Matthew’s narrative is a foreshadowing of the fully developed unbelief and hatred that Jesus will encounter in Jerusalem, for which God’s judgment will come upon “this generation” (23:32-36). If they are not willing to hold Him as the Son of God, however, they will not be able to endure the coming divine judgment. (CC)

13:58 LACK OF FAITH – Jesus refrained from doing many miracles because the people of Nazareth showed the lack of understanding that Jesus would increasingly face (cf v 13). (TLSB)

The people’s questions show their “unbelief” (*apistia*) in failing to honor Jesus even if only as a prophet. (CC)

13:53–58 Just as the people of Nazareth took offense at Jesus and refused to believe in Him, so today many are skeptical of His claims. They may agree that Jesus was a good religious teacher whose example we should follow. But they refuse to believe that He is “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary.” If we hear and understand, it is not by our own reason or strength but because the Holy Spirit has created faith in our hearts by the Gospel. Only the Spirit, working through the Word, can change an unbeliever’s heart. • Spirit of God, thank You for calling me by the Gospel and enlightening my heart. Amen. (TLSB)