

The Gospel of

MATTHEW

CHAPTERS 13-14

SECTION 1:

GETTING A CLEARER PICTURE

If you've ever tried using binoculars, you'll know that it can actually be pretty difficult to find what you're looking for at first; the image is usually too blurry, and often you're not even pointing them in the right direction. To find the thing you're looking for, you need more information—landmarks to help you focus your vision.

In the same way, the disciples' view of Jesus was blurry at first. They could tell he was important somehow, but they couldn't see him clearly for who he truly was: the Messiah, who would suffer and die for them. In these two chapters, Jesus begins teaching in parables to explain what his kingdom is like, and performs wonders that help us see who he really is and what his heart is like. This is where he begins to come into focus.

Major Movements of Matthew's Gospel

Ch 1-12

Kingship and Kingdom:
The Messiah brings God's kingdom in word and deed to all people.

Ch 13-20

Parables and Instruction:
The mission and identity of the Messiah comes into clearer focus.

Ch 21-28

Passion Week:
The mission of the Messiah culminates in his trial, death, and resurrection.

Matt 1:1

Sermon on the Mount
(5-7)

Commissioning of the 12
(10)

Parables of the kingdom
(13)

Marks of the kingdom community
(18-20)

Olivet Discourse
(24-25)

Matt 28:20

Major Discourses of Christ in Matthew

SECTION 2:

PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

Parables are easy reading, aren't they? They're short. They're fiction. On the surface, they're nice stories that teach us lessons on morality and religious principles. But Jesus didn't sit in front of crowds and tell stories to teach them how to be a better person. His stories were about the kingdom and how he was bringing it about.

Jesus' ministry was surprising. The things that Jesus did and taught would have naturally caused people to have questions. If he is the messiah, why is he getting such mixed responses? Why are the super religious people rejecting him? Is the kingdom really here? This is the context for the parables of chapter 13. Jesus wasn't telling these stories to teach people about horticulture or how to get to heaven. He was explaining, by way of illustration, what he was doing.

Through parables, Jesus invited people to imagine how his ministry was the arrival of God's kingdom. They invited the listener to rethink everything they thought the kingdom of heaven would be and grasp that Jesus is starting something new, something much better than anyone ever expected.

SECTION 3:

PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES

When Jesus gives his reason for speaking in parables, he doesn't say, "so everyone can understand" or "because stories are more engaging." If Jesus wanted to make everything clear, he could have given 5-point theological sermons. Instead, Jesus said he spoke in parables "because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matt 13:13) The parables were designed to reveal the message about the arrival of God's kingdom to some, while at the same time conceal it from others.

Jesus said that those with hearts prepared like good soil, who have "ears to hear" (Mark 4:9), ponder the words of Jesus and delight in the profound truths found in his teaching. The parables illustrate and clarify truth to those that God "has given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 13:11). But there are people who have chosen to not understand. Their hearts are hardened with no discipline or desire to learn from Jesus. For those people who reject Jesus, the parables are meant to conceal the secrets of the kingdom and remain fictitious stories about vineyards and fishing—nothing more.

Purpose of the Parables

To reveal the message of God's kingdom to some

To conceal the message of God's kingdom from others

To clarify truth to those that God has given knowledge of the kingdom to

SECTION 4:

VALUE OF THE KINGDOM

Imagine finding something so great that you would sell all you have to possess it—all you have worked so hard to accumulate, all you have trusted in, all you have inherited, all the things you have desired, all that you know. All of it means so little to you because you found something incomparably better. That's how Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven.

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl aren't about selling all your possessions to get to heaven. They're about value. What do we value and where does Christ fit into our value system.

In Christ and his kingdom, we have a treasure that is valuable beyond comprehension. So valuable that it's worth letting go of every temporal treasure, leaving everything we know and trust in to follow Christ. When the love of Christ captivates us, our hearts naturally love him first in a way that eclipses everything else, so much that we consider everything else as worthless in comparison (Phil 3:8).

SECTION 5:

COMPASSION AND PROVISION

In Matthew 14, we learn that John the Baptist, a close friend of Jesus, was executed by King Herod. When Jesus heard the news, he was so distraught that he “withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself” (Matt 14:13). The crowds that had been following him didn't know or understand this, and so they followed him along the shore, hoping to stay near to him. Nobody would have blamed Jesus if he had asked for some alone time, or a few days to get away and grieve with friends and family—but Jesus' love for them was so overwhelming that, when he saw them, he had compassion on them and he couldn't help but go back on shore and heal them and be with them. When evening came, he couldn't even bear to send them away to go grab dinner. His heart overflowed into provision for his people. The passage says,

“And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.” (Matt 14:20)

Jesus demonstrated his love for his people through his compassion and his provision. But not only did Jesus provide for his people with loaves of bread and fish—he became our provision itself. He is the good King that gives us himself so that we might never be hungry again.

SECTION 6:

THE POWERFUL KING

The Old Testament is full of imagery depicting God as the sovereign Lord over all of creation; he is the one who formed the mountains and filled the seas, and he upholds it all by his will. The disciples of Jesus understood that God is the only one with the authority to command the wind and the waves, so imagine their shock and awe at the sight of their own teacher walking on the waves in the midst of a violent storm as if the crashing waves of the sea were just ripples on a pond—this was not some ordinary man that they were following. This revelation of Jesus' power frightened the disciples, and it changed everything they thought they knew about him. Peter, in an act of great faith, was driven to call out to his Lord, believing that Jesus would uphold him and protect him.

“And Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.” (Matt 14:28-29)

Jesus demonstrated an authority over creation that defined him as the Son of God. And in a surprising movement of grace, he invited Peter to join him in that power as he walked on the water. By grace, he has given his people dominion over his creation (Gen 1:28-30), that they would care for it and cause it to flourish. By faith, he gives us the strength to walk with him each day, and in his compassion he rescues us when we fail and the waves begin to overwhelm us—and it is in that moment of rescue that we truly begin to see his power and worship him.

“But when [Peter] saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him...And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” (Matt 14:30, 32-33)