

Matthew 13:36 The Characteristic of Genuine Discipleship

Today we're continuing in Matthew 13:24-43. Last week, we finished with verses 34 and 35. We are going to go back to those two verses in our introduction this morning.

Matthew chapter 13 is The Parables of the Kingdom. There are eight parables in Matthew chapter 13. Four of them are one group that we've just finished studying, and they were given by the Lord to the public audience. The last four parables that we will get into here in a couple of weeks; the last four parables were given in private to the disciples. This is all very important.

Matthew chapter 13 marks a turning point in the Lord's public ministry, which we need to take note of. I introduced it to you last week, but I want to repeat this week, might even repeat it next week, because I am a repeater. I am a repeat offender when it comes to sharing the Word. So, this chapter marks the midway point of the Lord's ministry.

If you took the Gospels, and took a bird's eye view, like a forest view of the of the whole four Gospels, you'll realize that the first half of the Lord's ministry was public and He performed miracles and signs in order to reveal Himself and His truth to the people. But as time went on, revelation, the revealing of Himself changed to concealing Himself when He began to experience rejection and resistance. And that's the point that we are at in Matthew chapter 13, that midway point, when the Lord stopped revealing Himself to the general public and began to conceal Himself to the general public, but ministered privately to those who were His disciples.

We saw this explained back in Matthew 13:1, where Matthew says that with many things the Lord spoke in parables to the people. Later on, the disciples would come and ask Him, "Why are you speaking in parables? None of us understand what You're trying to get across."

We saw in Matthew chapter 13, beginning at verse 11, when Jesus answered them as to their question as to why He spoke in parables, He says, **Because to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens.** And that's Jewish by the way. *hashamayim*. The Jews called it not *heaven*, but *heavens*, plural. They believed there were three heavens: (1) atmosphere around the earth; (2) the place where the stars and constellations and planets are; and then beyond that, they believe there is a place where God dwelt, (3) the spiritual heaven. So, they called it the heavens. **But to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to those it has not been given. For whoever has, it will be given to him, and he will abound; and whoever does not have, even what he has, (this would be Jewish, their chosen position,) it will be taken away from him. On account of this, I speak to them in parables: because while seeing they do not see; and while hearing they do not hear, neither do they understand. And this is a fulfillment of prophecy (in verse 14) where Isaiah the prophet said, (in Isaiah 6:9-10 he said) "In hearing you will hear, and you should not understand; and while seeing you will see, and should not perceive: for the heart of this people became fat (or heavy) and with their ears they heard heavily, and with their eyes they closed that they should not see with their eyes, and with the ears they should hear, and with the heart they should understand; that they should turn and I should heal them."**

So, the Lord says, "In order that I should not turn and heal them it's been concealed to them." Which is interesting because you've got the word *healed* in there. You don't have to take my word for it, read it through the Gospels. When Jesus, in the first half of His ministry when He revealed Himself, He revealed through signs and wonders and miracles and healings. And the thousands of people were gathered to Him because of these miracles. The problem was that after they received their healings and saw the miracles and were excited and believed in who Jesus was, Jesus said, "From now on, in order to be My disciple, you must deny yourself, and take up your cross, and follow Me." And the people didn't want anything more to do with Him.

I find that fascinating today, in ministry. I've been in ministry for a little over 50 years and been in different church programs and church systems; realizing that we do whatever we can do to try to attract people to Jesus and offer people the miracles of Jesus. The problem is we don't tell them what it's like to be a disciple of Jesus, because to be His disciple you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. He wasn't interested in attracting people. He wasn't interested in starting a movement. He was interested in reaching the lost sheep of Christ for Himself.

And so, He goes on to say in Matthew 13:16, that for them it's concealing, concealing the truth from them so that they will not understand. **But blessed are your eyes, because they see: and blessed are your ears, because they hear.** This is the answer to the disciples asking Jesus, "Why do you speak in parables? You are speaking a way that people cannot understand." It is interesting because they sought Jesus out to find out this answer, and to find the meaning to the parable that He just spoke.

And then He gave three more parables, that we finished last week. And in verses 34 and 35 again it says, **All these things Jesus spoke in parables to the crowds; and without a parable** (the word *without*, **χωρίς** in Greek means *separate from*) **separate from a parable He was not speaking anything to them: (verse 35) so that it was fulfilled that which had been spoken through the prophet,** (this would be Psalm 78:2, Asaph's Psalm) **"I will open my mouth in parables; I will speak out things which have been hidden from the foundation of the world."** And so Jesus spoke in parables about mysteries.

You ever notice, as you read through the New Testament, the things of Christ are called *mysteries*? The mysteries of Christ. "Well, how can it be mysteries when we have our Bible? We've got them all written right here. It's not mysteries." But how many years have we gone in the study and the reading of the Scriptures and not being able to understand what they mean? They're still hidden and still a mystery until God's Spirit reveals to us and enlightens us as to the truth of what they mean and draws us to Christ.

All this is to point to the fact that at the midway point of Jesus' ministry, He stopped the outward manifestation of miracles to the crowds, and began to focus on the ministry to His disciples. Because He was rejected and resisted by the crowds when they found out that after responding to the miracles they had to follow Him, and deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow Him.

And as I said, over ministry, I find it fascinating that we had so many committee meetings and so many programs in order to attract people, when Jesus didn't do that to attract people. He came to seek His own.

So, at this point, we see that Jesus hides the truth except from those who are His. He is not trying to start a movement. He is not trying to start a program. His Spirit reaches out to those who would come to Him and follow Him.

Verse 36, for today, The Curiosity of the Disciples. And what is interesting, just like we had back in verse 11 of this chapter, after the first parable when the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Why do you speak in parables?", now we have the curiosity of the disciples again. After three more parables they come to Him, look at verse 36, **Then after having sent away the crowds Jesus came into the house.** So, He is no longer speaking to the crowds in public. The four parables given in public are now over. Jesus is now in the house. **And His disciples came to Him, saying, declare or explain to us The Parable of the Tares (or darnel) of the Field.**

So, so far we have had The Parable of the Sower in verses 1 through 23; The Parable of the Wheat and Tares in verses 24 through 30; The Parable of the Mustard Seed in 31 and 32; and The Parable of the Leaven in verse 33. But they only asked Jesus to explain one parable, "Explain to us The Parable of the Tares (or the darnel) of the Field." The reason for this is, as I've pointed out for you for the last three weeks, all four parables are teaching the same thing. And how Bible teachers and Bible scholars go off on tangents, taking each parable out of context to decide what each parable is trying to say. We see the disciples only ask Him to explain one because they knew the other two were dependent upon that one in His explanation so that they would understand. Because they understood that all three now, meaning four with the first parable that He gave, all mean the same thing.

So, I want you to know that this verse gives us tremendous insight into true and genuine discipleship. It gives us tremendous understanding. First of all, the disciples of Christ do not automatically understand what Jesus is teaching just by standing there and having Jesus say to them, "The one who has ears to hear let him hear." Like some kind of magical, mystical thing happens where if you are standing there it's like, "Oh! I get it!" Back in verse 11 the disciples sought out Jesus to say, "Why do you speak in parables and what does it mean?" Here the disciples are seeking out Jesus. They were part of the crowd. They had no special revelation anymore than anybody else in the crowd, but they came to Jesus to get the understanding. So, we learn that genuine disciples and genuine discipleship seeks out the Lord for understanding.

I told you before about the literal translation, that when Jesus said, "The one who has ears to hear, let them hear." That last phrase *let him hear* is actually a command in the Greek text, "The one having ears to hear, *hear*." Jesus is giving a command to activate the hearing. And the response of those who already have a precondition of having ears to hear. And again, it wasn't some magical, mystical formula that made them understand that when He said, "Those who have ears to hear, hear," caused them to seek Him out. Showing seeking out the Lord, and seeking through His word is a characteristic of someone who is genuinely saved and genuinely belongs to Christ.

In Jeremiah 29:13 God says, "**And you shall seek Me and shall find Me when you shall search for Me with all of your heart.**" Again, "**And you shall seek Me and shall find Me when you shall search for Me with all of your heart.**" So, just the curiosity, "What does that mean?" It caused them to seek out the Lord to find out the meaning of the text, and it is interesting to them, and them only, did Jesus reveal the truth and the message about what He meant. So it is interesting, it is not for the general public. It's for those who are responding to Christ, being drawn to Him by the Father.

So, the pursuit of the truth of the Word of God is one of the characteristics of someone who is genuinely saved. This trend we also found back in verse 11. You remember the disciples were drawn out to find out what the first parable meant. Now, they are coming and saying, "Can you explain (or declare) to us what the parable of the tares (or the darnel) are all about? This little huddle of Jesus with His disciples, shows us that Jesus came to gather together His lost sheep. Jesus came to gather together His lost sheep.

Let me share with you from John 10:1-5. There are two sections here, and by the way John 10:6 tells us that this is a parable. This is about the sheep in the sheepfold. Just to explain to you about the sheepfold. Some of you might already know about it. But in Palestine they had a walled area where they would keep the sheep at night to keep them protected. Tall wall so that animals could not jump over the wall and get to the sheep. And in the evening hours, the shepherds would come and bring their sheep and just let them go and let them mix in with all the other sheep from all the other shepherds. And you say, "Well, how do they keep them separate? Keep them branded or what do they do?" In those days the sheep know the voice of the shepherd. And all the shepherd has to do is stand in the doorway of the sheepfold and call his sheep and only his sheep will respond and come out. Nobody else's sheep will respond except to their own shepherd.

So, keep that in mind as we break this down into two sections. Verses 1 and 2 of John chapter 10 is The Characteristics of the Genuine Shepherd. Jesus said, **Truly, truly, I say to you, the One not entering in through the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.** That transparency. That standing up in the doorway and calling the sheep, instead of trying to climb up some other way and steal them. I've used this text over the years to give messages to those who were called to ministry and Bible schools in seminary, and let them know that if you have been called, all you need to do under the influence and power of God's Spirit through His word is just give the word, give the truth. Those who are Christ's sheep will respond. You don't have to use gimmicks, programs, trickery, to get people to respond. Transparency. Stand in the doorway, pick up God's word and minister. And then I always got in response, "Well, what happens if you do that and nothing happens?" And my traditional response is, "Well, then, sit down because you haven't been called." The true Shepherd, the genuine Shepherd stands in the door of the sheepfold and calls the sheep.

Verse 2, **But the One entering in through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter (or doorkeeper) opens.** You see the porter, or the doorkeeper, recognizes the various shepherds. He opens the door for each shepherd when they come. The porter is believed to be, according to Jewish approach to this, John the Baptist. He introduced Jesus to Israel. Jesus came through the porter, who recognized Messiah as He came.

Now, verses 3 through 5, we have eight things that are characteristics of genuine sheep. We saw The Characteristics of Genuine Shepherd, now we have The Characteristics of the Genuine Sheep. There are eight things: **So to him the porter opens the door; and the sheep hear his voice.** The word *hear* is a present tense. These are all present tense verbs, which means they are factual. It is not subjunctive mood meaning they should hear His voice, they are hearing His voice, factual statement. It is impossible for His sheep not to hear His voice. (1) **And the sheep are hearing His voice.** That is point number one.

Secondly, (2) **And he is calling his own sheep.** Factual statement, present tense. He's calling them according to name.

And thirdly, (3) **He is leading them out to Himself.**

Verse 4, (4) **And when he puts out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him.** Again, present tense, they are following Him, factual statement.

(5) **For they know his voice.** Factual statement.

(6) **And a stranger will they not follow.** factual statement.

(7) **But will flee from him:** (8) **for they know not the voice of strangers.**

Interesting, people get all concerned and afraid of people listening to false teaching. I get concerned too. I get more concerned about the false teaching than the people, because if you belong to Christ and are surrendered to Christ, you will not listen to a strange voice. You will listen to your Shepherd. And you know His voice as He leads you.

I John 2:19 says that **They went out from our fellowship because they were not of us. Had they been of us they would they would not of gone out from us, and by this God has manifested that they were not of us.** They listened to a different voice, followed a different doctrine. It's God's way of bringing division even in the church. And I've told you this before, when you preach the gospel you're bringing division amongst unsaved people, because those who respond are divided out and come to Christ. There is a division that takes place when a person surrenders their life to Christ. They are separated from the world and the rest of the nonbelievers.

But according to Paul in I Corinthians 11:19, there is also necessary for there to be divisions in the church. He says, "There are schisms and divisions amongst you and I partly believe it because it's necessary for there to be divisions so that those who are approved of God might be made manifest." Here is that transparency of standing in front of the door and letting God's light shine, and letting God's Spirit manifest, and letting God's Word speak. All of our churches, ours included, all of our churches we are all separated and different from one another because of personal beliefs and convictions.

If we ever got together and studied the Word of God together, based on the merits of Scripture, as my mentor said in the first meeting I ever had with him back in 1970. He said, "If

everybody had the same educational tools in working with the Word of God, we would have no differences, because the appeal would be made to what the Scripture says." But there's division. There's division when you proclaim the Word and there's division when you teach the Word. It exposes, causes people even to leave. People that we thought were saved and yet it becomes revealed that they are listening to the voice of a stranger, and following a different and a false gospel.

Only those who belong to Christ will come to Him. To seek out that personal intimate relationship and fellowship with Him and to receive the answers to the mysteries of Christ. It won't be to the general public. And I've found that to be true over the years as well. The larger the church and the larger the group that I spoke in front of, the more general the message came out. But the smaller the group, the more specific we got. And we have an opportunity at this time in history to be a small group and we can concentrate on the Word. We can concentrate verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book, to receive from God's Spirit what God's Word is saying; and allow God's Spirit to make the changes and transformation in our life and give us the understanding that we need of the mysteries of Christ.

Tremendous insight into following the disciples in their response to Christ. Twice now in this chapter there was a coming to Jesus and saying, "Well, when you're out there with the with the public now, you're speaking in stories and parables, which they can't understand. Why are You doing that? Why don't you want them to understand?" It's because they don't want Christ. People might even want to know more about what the Bible teaches. I've come across hundreds and thousands of people over the years that want to study the Bible and that's one of the reasons why I backed out of the seminary education system. Because people were more interested in the Bible than they were in Jesus. They wanted to get their head educated with the Bible. I'm all in to studying the Bible. But God's Spirit uses the truth of God's Word to bring Christ into our life, and to make our relationship with Jesus Christ more intimate, more substantial. Walking in the truth is important. Jesus said, "You shall come to know the truth and the truth will set you free." He didn't say the Scripture would set you free, or the Bible would set you free, He said the truth. The Scripture as its taught in context will set people free.

So, the disciples now have entered into this intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and this will take place for the second half of His ministry. He was here for three years in ministry, but only the first half was public and revelatory. Whereas the second half was concealing and Jesus kept His teachings and the revelation of truth to His disciples.

I mentioned to you when we studied about the parable of the mustard seed, how the kingdom of heaven is like the tiniest of agricultural (or garden seeds), called the mustard seed, but it grows to be as big as a tree. The startings of the church began with just a few people, but it has grown to the point that when Christ comes it will be like a tree. But, Acts chapter 1 tells us that after three years of ministry, and Jesus died, and was buried, and ascended up, was raised up from the dead, and ascended up into heaven, that when He gave the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2 there were only 120 believers. After three years, and all those thousands of people that were touched in miraculous ways, only 120 were there waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is just very few. Most people are camped out amongst the miracles and the attractions and the programs, but back off from walking in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I've said it for a long time and I'll repeat it again this morning, Jesus said to be His disciple you must deny yourself. But we, leaders in the church today, we say, "Come to church and express yourself." It's following Jesus Christ and letting Him be Lord, making the changes in us to bring us closer to Him. That is what Biblical Christianity is all about.

Let's close with prayer.