

The Receptive Kingdom

KINGDOM COME: How Jesus Revealed It in Parables #1 - Pastor Gary Combs - August 16, 2026 - Matthew 13:1-23

INTRO: Good morning church! We're beginning a new 5-week sermon series today called KINGDOM COME: How Jesus Revealed It in Parables. All five sermons will come from the parables of Jesus found in Matthew 13. The series title comes from Jesus teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:

Matthew 6:9-10 (KJV) Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy **kingdom come**, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Every time we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we are praying for the rule and reign of God to come more fully into this world and into our lives.

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven, He was not primarily speaking of a place, but a presence; not merely a realm, but a reign; not a castle or a crown, but a Carpenter who came as King.

Wherever Jesus the King is received, His reign begins to transform hearts and lives. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

The kingdom of heaven is the saving reign of God that entered history through Jesus the King, is even now breaking into this present age wherever His rule is received, and will one day be fully and visibly established when Christ returns.

Now here's the tension in our text. By Matthew chapter 13, the disciples have been praying "thy kingdom come" for seven chapters. What has come? A carpenter in a boat. No throne. No army. Rome still standing. And chapter 12 just ended with the religious leaders plotting to kill Him.

What showed up looked like a farmer scattering seed, and three-fourths of it never bore fruit!

So Jesus sits down in a boat and starts telling parables. Not to change the subject, but to answer the prayer. You asked for a kingdom. Let me show you what it looks like when it comes. What is a parable?

A parable is more than an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus' parables were simple stories drawn from everyday life that revealed the mysteries of the kingdom to receptive hearts. Yet, as we'll see today, those same stories could also conceal the truth from hearts that had become hardened.

Parables don't merely illustrate truth. They expose our response to truth. They reveal our spiritual receptivity.

Need: And that raises a very personal question for us: How receptive are we to the King and His kingdom? We can sit in church, hear the Word, sing the songs, know the prayers, and still have a heart that is resistant to what God is saying. The problem is not that God is silent. The problem is that sometimes we aren't really listening.

Trans: Jesus will describe four people who all hear the same message. The same sower. The same seed. But dramatically different results. The difference is not the seed. The difference is the soil. And the condition of the soil represents the spiritual receptivity of the heart.

So before we spend five weeks asking, "What do these parables teach us about the kingdom?" Jesus begins by asking an even more basic question: "Do you have ears to hear?" Because before we can understand the mysteries of the kingdom, we must have hearts that are spiritually receptive to the Word of the King.

BODY: In the gospel of Matthew 13, Jesus taught the parable of the sower, illustrating the importance of spiritual receptivity to the word of the kingdom of heaven. We can respond receptively to the word of the kingdom. How can we respond receptively to the word of the kingdom? The text gives **three ways** we can respond receptively to the word of the kingdom.

Read text: Matthew 13:1-23 (ESV) That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2 And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, 6 but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8 Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear." 10 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" 11 And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.'" 15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' 16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. 18 "Hear then the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. 20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.[b] 22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. 23 As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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WE CAN RESPOND RECEPTIVELY TO THE WORD OF THE KINGDOM:

1. By listening attentively to the Word.

EXP: (1-9) Look at v.9, "He who has ears, let him hear." If you have ears to hear, then listen attentively. Notice where Jesus is. He leaves the house. Most likely Peter's in Capernaum. The crowd is so large He pushes off from shore and sits in a boat, turning the cove into an amphitheater. And He sits, the posture of a rabbi teaching with authority.

"Hear" (9 -14x) (ἀκούω, *akouō*) - to hear, to attend to, consider what is or has been said, not deaf.

"Parables" (3,10,13,18 - 4x) (παραβολή, *parabolē*) - Lit., "a placing (throwing) of one thing by the side of another," an example by which a doctrine or precept is illustrated. "A metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought." — C. H. Dodd

"Path ... devoured" (4) (κατεσθίω, *katesthiō*) - to consume by eating, to eat up, devour

"Rocky ... scorched" (5) (καυματίζω, *kaumatizō*) - to burn with heat, to scorch; with intense heat

"Thorns ... choked" (7) (ἀποπνίγω, *apopnigō*) - to choke; to suffocate with water, drown

"Good soil" (8) (καλός, *kalos*) - beautiful, excellent, surpassing, commendable, admirable

ARG: All through Scripture, hearing is the fundamental posture of faith.

Romans 10:17 (ESV) So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

The receptive heart not only hears, but applies the Word to their life.

James 1:22 (ESV) But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

ILL: A parable is like trap. You start listening because of what Dodd calls "its vividness or strangeness," maybe not understanding it or thinking it's talking about someone else. Remember Nathan the prophet standing in front of King David (2 Sam. 12:1-15)? He didn't open with an accusation. He told a parable about a rich man and a poor man's lamb. And David got angry... at the man in the story. Then the trap closed: Nathan said, "You are the man." That's what a parable does. It slips past your defenses while you're leaning in to hear about somebody else. And then you realize the story is about you.

APP: How do you come to God's Word? Do you come merely to finish a reading plan, hear a sermon, or check a box? Or do you come praying like young Samuel:

1 Samuel 3:10 (NIV) "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Do you have ears to hear? Do you listen attentively to God's Word? We can respond receptively to the word of the kingdom by listening attentively.

2. By seeking to understand the Word.

EXP: (10-17) But now having heard, do we understand what we've heard? Notice the word, "understand" (13,14,15,19 - 4x). Now watch what the disciples do in v.10. They "came" to Him and asked a question: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" That question reveals something important about the disciples. They sought to understand. Indeed, in Luke's gospel they "asked him what this parable meant" (Luke 8:9). And Jesus gives them three reasons for speaking in parables:

1) Because understanding is a gift from God. "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (11).

"Secrets" (11) (μυστήριον, *mustērion*) - hidden thing, secret, mystery

"Kingdom" (11) (βασιλεία, *basileia*) - a kingdom, dominion, rule. 126 times, primarily in Christ's teachings.

"Of heaven" - Remember the prayer: "on earth as it is in heaven." Synonymous with Kingdom of God.

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2) Because it both reveals and conceals according to the condition of the heart. To those who receive what God gives, more understanding is given (12). But to those whose hearts have grown dull, the truth remains hidden even though they hear the words (13).

“Understand” (13,14,15,19 - 4x) (συνίημι, *sunīēmi*) - to bring together; in the mind: to understand. “Christ taught in parables. Thereby the things of God were made more plain and easy to those willing to be taught, and at the same time more difficult and obscure to those who were willingly ignorant.” — Matthew Henry

3) Because it fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah.

“Isaiah is fulfilled” (14) (ἀναπληρώω, *anaplērōō*) - to complete; accomplish, fill up, fulfill. (Isa. 6:9-10).

“Heart has grown dull” (15) (παχύνω, *pachunō*) - to make thick, to render dull or callous. “The spiritual dullness was the situation within which Jesus taught rather than itself the product of his teaching ... The emphasis is not on either the purpose or result of Jesus’ speaking in parables, but rather on the existing situation within which it took place” (R.T. France, *Matthew*, 222-223).

“Barely hear” (15) (βαρέως, *bareōs*) - heavily, with difficulty, dully

“Eyes ... closed” (15) (καμμύω, *kammūō*) - to shut the eyes, close the eyes. Willfully closed.

“I would heal them” (15) (ἰάομαι, *iaomai*) - to cure, heal; to make whole; to free from errors and sins

“But blessed are your eyes” (16) (μακάριος, *makarios*) - supremely blest; fortunate, well off, happy

ARG: The Lord gives understanding to those who seek Him.

Proverbs 2:2-6 (NLT) Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. ...For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

ILL: Two students. Two students in the same lecture. One walks out at the bell. The other stays and asks the professor questions. One makes an A, the other fails. Both heard. Only one sought understanding.

APP: Notice the beautiful interplay between God’s grace and human response. Spiritual understanding is a gift of grace. Yet the disciples did not passively sit back and wait for understanding. They came to Jesus and asked questions. God gives understanding to receptive hearts, and receptive hearts seek the understanding God gives. We can respond receptively to the word of the kingdom by listening attentively and seeking to understand. And...

3. By bearing the fruit of the Word.

EXP: (18-23) Beginning in v.18, Jesus explained the parable. Look at v.23, only the 4th soil, the good soil, produced spiritual fruit. The four soils represented four heart responses to the seed, which is “the word of the kingdom” (19). So the seed is the Word, the soil is the heart, but who is the sower? Here’s it’s Jesus, as He later states “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man” (37). But it might also be any of us who scatters the Word, which is the gospel of Jesus, to others.

1) The hard path (19) heard the Word but did not understand it, and the evil one snatched it away **“Snatches away”** (19) (ἁρπάζω, *harpazō*) - to seize, carry off by force; to snatch out or away

2) The rocky soil (20-21) received it quickly and joyfully, but because there was no root, trouble and persecution exposed the shallowness of the response. **“Tribulation arises”** (21) (θλίψις, *thlipsis*) - a pressure; metaphor for oppression, affliction, tribulation. **“Falls away”** (21) (σκανδαλίζω, *skandalizō*) - to put a stumbling block in the way, which trips one to fall.

3) The thorny soil (22) heard it, but “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke” it. **“Deceitfulness of riches”** (22) (ἀπάτη, *apatē*) - deceit, deceitfulness; delusion. **“Proves unfruitful”** (22) (ἄκαρπος, *akarpōs*) - without fruit, barren, not yielding what it ought to yield

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4) The good soil (23) heard, understood, and bore fruit. Notice the progression: He hears. He understands. He bears fruit. The evidence of genuine receptivity is not merely that we heard the Word or even that we understood the Word intellectually. It's that the Word produces something in us.

ARG: Jesus consistently taught that genuine discipleship produces fruit.

John 15:8 (ESV): "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

ILL: I planted a raised bed garden this year. I planted several tomato vines, peppers, onions, cucumbers, zucchini, lettuce... Not because I enjoy planting. I enjoy harvesting and eating. My tomato vines took off quickly, some made fruit, some didn't, but all started getting yellow, wilted leaves and died during the drought. Very disappointing. But boy, my cucumbers and zucchini have thrived!

APP: So what fruit is the Word producing in us? Not, "How many sermons have I heard?" Not, "How much Bible knowledge do I have?" But, "What is different in my life because the Word of the King has taken root in my heart?" Is it producing greater love? Greater holiness? Greater generosity? Greater forgiveness? Greater courage Greater obedience? Greater concern for people far from God? Is it bearing fruit?

CONCLUSION: We started this morning with a prayer you've probably prayed a hundred times: "Thy kingdom come."

Matthew 13 tells us the kingdom does not come the way we expect, with armies and thrones and headlines. It comes like seed, small, hidden, easily overlooked, yet powerful enough to produce a harvest far greater than itself.

So when you pray, "Thy kingdom come," you are asking God to take the throne in ground where something else may already be growing. It's not a safe prayer. It's a prayer that costs you every rival kingdom you've been quietly cultivating.

But here is the good news. The Sower is extravagantly generous. He scatters the seed even on hard, shallow, and thorny ground.

And Jesus Himself became like a seed. He said:

John 12:23-24 (ESV) And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Jesus died, was buried, and rose again so that we might confess Him as King and receive the life of His kingdom.

So the good news this morning is not, "Try harder to become good soil."

The good news begins with answering this simple question: **What kind of soil is your heart?**

So perhaps the question Jesus leaves us with today is the same one He left that crowd beside the sea:

"He who has ears, let him hear."

So the question is simple:

What kind of soil is your heart today?

And perhaps the prayer we need today is simply:

"King Jesus, give me ears to hear, a heart to understand, and a life that bears fruit. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in me, as it is in heaven."

Let's pray.