



REV. D. THOMAS PORTER, PH.D.

3422 Fallview Court ♦ Land O' Lakes, FL 34639
<http://PorterHouse.info> ♦ DrTom@PorterHouse.info
 813.962.5758^{Office} 813.728.5713^{Cell}
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LESSON NOTES (EXPLORE THE BIBLE)

REVEALING MYSTERIES: THE PARABLE OF THE SOILS
 (Matthew 13) Lord's Day, February 28, 2017

OVERVIEW

"Session 13" for this week in the *Explore the Bible Series*

Navigating the Scriptures can be, perhaps must be, a humbly endeavor. Just when we think we know, we're taught by His leading we don't know as much as we thought.

**A QUESTION TO GET YOU THINKING:
 SHOULD SOWING ON ROCKY GROUND BE AVOIDED? GROUND RIFE WITH THISTLES? SHALLOW SOIL? GROUND COVERED WITH CONCRETE?**

Throughout the wisdom of the Lord God as revealed in Scripture, the natural world, and His management of history, we learn much, and yet simultaneously learn how little we do not know. It is useful, however, to believe we know more than we do—anxiety is ambiguity's sister. It is also useful to believe we don't need to know some things, for they "are beyond us;" they are simply unknowable. Differentiating those things which we need to know (e.g., God's expectations for us) from those things we do not need to know (e.g., how¹ God selected us for salvation).

Jesus provides some guidance in this differentiation examination. Using what we now call post-modern textual constructivism, He relates a story/narrative/parable whose truth² leads to Truth about said differentiation. To wit, Jesus teaches that knowledge will be taken away from those who do not believe; to wit, the message regarding the kingdom must be understood, developed, protected and shared. Otherwise, Satan will snatch it away, tough times will distort, truth messages will crowd out Truth messages, and branches without fruit will wither.

¹This is one of the few instances of theological endeavor where the "why" is abundantly clear, but the "how" escapes us.

²Understanding the Truth versus truth is key here. All of us have a sense of truth—how we see the world given our enculturated epistemologies, and our need to see, understand, remember and do what we *want* to see, understand, remember and do (Porter's First Law of Human Behavior—see <http://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=150>). Yet, most hold there is indeed Truth, beyond our filtering. Specifically, the Truth exists regardless of our ability to observe, hear, calculate; truth, however, is that which is constructed via our observations and calculations.

The goal of Spirit-led believers is to ensure their truth is the Truth. Jesus is the Truth; our understanding of Him is truth. "Love your neighbor" is Truth; the parable/story of the Good Samaritan is truth. A parable is a truth mechanism which can open up the Truth. Jesus was the master of using truth stories (i.e., narratives) to evoke Truth understanding.

CONTEXT

Jesus has been teaching revolution—people will be held accountable for whom they give credit for righteousness. When people pedaled out their epistemology to Him—*give us a sign*—He provided only one—the sign of Jonah. The example of Jonah was an insult for Jonah had been less than the stellar model of the Lord God Jehovah. Jonah resented sharing the gospel with the uncircumcised. Yet, here was this Jesus not only declaring their “call for a sign” demonic, but the whole generation wicked. Even His mother and brothers were not immune.

TEXT

Matthew 13:1-9. *Like the farmer, success is not the only outcome, even with sharing the gospel.* So on the same day all this hit the fan, Jesus went to sit by the lake. So many folk followed that He got into a boat, sat down as teachers were accustomed in that day to do, and taught the folk who stood on the shore. One of the many narratives He shared was—

Once upon a time, a salesman went out to sell a wonderful product. As he was going to meet some potential clients, some jailbirds came and stole some of his product.

Some of his clients had rocks in their heads—sure, they quickly started using his wonderful product, but stopped when their shallow expectations weren't met. And, when things got difficult, their use of the product diminished—their support for the product's use was skin-deep.

Other clients grabbed ahold of the new wonder, but as they used it, competing products which pretended to be wonderful, choked out the use of the actually wonderful product.

Other clients loved the new product—their support and daily growth in its use was profound. These new clients would tell other potential clients about the wonderful product. Often one client would bring in another 100, or some 60, or others thirty.

So—if you've got a brain in your head—use it, Jesus concluded.

Q Why did Jesus the Christ get into a boat? Why did He sit down while teaching? While He read Scripture? (see Luke 4:16ff).

MATTHEW 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying:

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

⁹He who has ears, let him hear.”

- Q Who is the farmer? [Hint: it's not you. Nor the preacher. Nor the professor. Nor the priest. Nor the bishop. Nor the pastor.] What is the soil? [Hint: it is you and your fellow soiled friends.] What is the seed?
- Q What are some examples of stolen seed today? Rocky/shallow soil? Thorn-encrusted soil? Fertile soil?
- Q What makes some soil produce 100 fold and other soil 60 or 30 fold? In other words, what is "good soil?"
- Q Why did Jesus teach the lesson of the different soils? In other words, what is the principal principle being taught here and why was that needed to be taught?

CONTEXT

Matthew 13:10-17. *Speaking Truth in parables reveals truth.*³ So, Jesus, the disciples asked—what's up with the stories? Why not just say the Truth straight up front?

Jesus replied—understanding the complexities of the kingdom of heaven has already been given to you, my students. But not to those who do not follow Me. Remember, whoever has been given this understanding will receive even more—abundantly. Those who do not have My understanding will lose even more. This is why I teach through stories. Though observing, they do not learn; though hearing they do not listen, nor understand. Remember what Isaiah said:

You're always depending upon what you see and hear without understanding. Your heart's have become calloused to the Truth, by the truth. If it weren't for the truth, people might see the Truth. Their ears and eyes would see, understand with their raison d'être—AND would heal them.

You will be closer to the Lord God (i.e., blessed) when your eyes see and your ears hear the Truth. Because I tell you the Truth, many prophets and other righteous people have longed to see what you see now, and hear what you hear now.

MATTHEW 10:10-17

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

¹¹He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹²Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ¹³This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

" `You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵For 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.' [Isaiah 6:9-10]

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷For 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.

³Understanding the Truth versus truth is key here. All of us have a sense of truth—how we see the world given our enculturated epistemologies, and our need to see, understand, remember and do what we *want* to see, understand, remember and do (Porter's First Law of Human Behavior—see <http://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=150>). Yet, most hold there is indeed Truth, beyond our filtering. Specifically, the Truth exists regardless of our ability to observe, hear, calculate; truth, however, is that which is constructed via our observations and calculations.

The goal of Spirit-led believers is to ensure their truth is the Truth. Jesus is the Truth; our understanding of Him is truth. "Love your neighbor" is Truth; the parable/story of the Good Samaritan is truth. A parable is a truth mechanism which can open up the Truth. Jesus was the master of using truth stories (i.e., narratives) to evoke Truth understanding.

- Q Why were the secrets of the kingdom revealed to the disciples, but not previous prophets and righteous people?
- Q Why is knowledge taken from those who have less? [Hint: see also Romans 1:18-25]

Notae Bene

ROMANS 1:18-32

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, **who suppress the truth by their wickedness**, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22Although they claimed to be wise**, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸Furthermore, just **as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind**, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³²Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

- Q What is the role of faith in understanding? For example, what assumptions of faith are necessary to understand? Which is causal, understanding or faith? Or, are they cauffective?

INSPIRED COMMENTARY

Matthew 13:18-23. *The Master explains the Truth within a truth.*⁴ So, listen up...

When anyone hears about the kingdom of God and does not understand it—Satan comes and snatches away that which had become part of his *raison d'être*—that is, the wonderful product which was stolen.

The client who received the wonderful product with great joy at first, but was too rock headed to establish a relationship with the wonder used the product only a short time. So when tough times come, he quickly gave up on the wonderful product.

The client used the wonderful product with other products, presumably also wonderful, the false products choked out the wonder of the wonderful product. Life worries and wealth idolatry made his acceptance of the wonderful product fruitless.

But there were other clients who received the wonderful product and told others. Some clients who had accepted the wonderful product also protected it, kept it from competing false products, and then told others. Some clients had 100 people also accept the wonderful product. Others sixty and others thirty.

THEREFORE

The message about the kingdom of heaven needs:

1. Understanding; otherwise, Satan will snatch it away before it has time to germinate.
2. Development; without roots, tough times will dilute/distort/deform the message, rather than strengthen its healing revelatory power.
3. Protection; lots of people and evil forces want the beauty and power of the message—these false messengers and truths can crowd out the Truth.
4. Sharing; fruit is the metric by which the acceptance of the message is measured. The kingdom grows by hearing and understanding the Word.

Q Just what is the “wonderful product;” i.e., just what is the “message about the kingdom of heaven?”

Q How can different explanations of “the message” affect and effect fruit?

Q What interpretations of Jesus’ narratives have you heard which do not correspond/agree with His interpretation?

MATTHEW 13:18-23

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.

⁴Understanding the Truth versus truth is key here. All of us have a sense of truth—how we see the world given our enculturated epistemologies, and our need to see, understand, remember and do what we *want* to see, understand, remember and do (Porter’s First Law of Human Behavior—see <http://TheScoop.DThomasPorter.com/?p=150>). Yet, most hold there is indeed Truth, beyond our filtering. Specifically, the Truth exists regardless of our ability to observe, hear, calculate; truth, however, is that which is constructed via our observations and calculations.

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SOME KEY QUESTIONS

- Q Who is the farmer? [Hint: it's not you. Nor the preacher. Nor the professor. Nor the priest. Nor the bishop. Nor the pastor.] What is the soil? [Hint: it is you and your fellow soiled friends.] What is the seed?
- Q Why is knowledge taken from those who have less?
- Q What is the role of faith in understanding? For example, what assumptions of faith are necessary to understand? Which is causal, understanding or faith? Or, are they cauffective?
- Q How can different explanations of "the message" affect and effect fruit?

13:3-9 See vv. 18-23 for the interpretation of this first parable. **13:3** *parables*. Our word "parable" comes from the Greek *parabole*, (παροβολη) 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 Mk 4:2; Lk 8:4).

to sow his seed. Lk 8:5.

13:4-6 See Mk 4:3-8.

13:11 *secrets of the kingdom of heaven*. See Mk 4:11 and Lk 8:10.

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

13:13 *Though seeing, they do not see*. See notes on Mk 4:12 and Lk 8:10.

13:18 *what the parable of the sower means*. Jesus seldom interpreted his parables, but here he does.

13:19 *the evil one*. The devil.

13:24 *The kingdom of heaven is like*. This phrase introduces six of the seven parables in this chapter (all but the parable of the sower).

13:25 *weeds*. Probably darnel, which looks very much like wheat while it is young, but can later be distinguished. The field is the world (v. 38). Thus the people of the kingdom live side by side with the people of the evil one.

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

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.

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).

13:33 In the Bible, yeast usually symbolizes that which is evil or unclean (see 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 Holy Spirit (using Holy Spirit's Scripture).

13:35 *spoken through the prophet*. The quotation is from (Ps 78, a psalm ascribed to Asaph, who according to 2Ch 29:30 was a "seer" (prophet).

⁵Adapted and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

13:37 *Son of Man*. See note on Mk 8:31.

13:42 *fiery furnace*. Often mentioned in connection with the final judgment in apocalyptic literature (see Rev 19:20; 20:14).

weeping and gnashing of teeth. Occurs six times in Matthew's Gospel (8:12; here; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) and nowhere else in the NT.

13:44-46 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.

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).

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).

13:53 Concludes a teaching section and introduces a narrative section (cf. 7:28-29).

13:54 *his hometown*. Nazareth. *teaching the people in their synagogue*. See Mk 1:21.

13:55 *carpenter's son*. The word (τεκνον) often incorrectly translated "carpenter" should be translated "stonemason" or "contractor." (Apparently Joseph was not living at the time of this incident.)

brothers. Sons born to Joseph and Mary after the virgin birth of Jesus (see Luke 8:19); some hold these children to be Joseph's from a previous marriage, or cousins, not brothers/sisters per se.

13:58 *lack of faith*. The close relationship between faith and miracles is stressed in Matthew's Gospel (cf. 8:10,13; 9:2,22,28-29).