

13:24 *His field*- Potentially, even then, the field of the world had been given to the Lord Jesus.

13:25 *While men slept*- The sense of "while" is supplied by the translators. It could just as well mean that *when* men slept- after the death of the apostles? And yet the Lord commands His followers *not* to sleep, and Paul in 1 Thess. 5 repeats this. The implication could be that the sowing of the weeds was avoidable if the Lord's workers had been more attentive. Jesus so understands human weakness. But let's try to enter into the sense of shame and hurt which He must feel at our apathy; the shame is similar to the shame of the farmer who has tares growing in his field. Everyone sees it's the result of his workers sleeping instead of keeping the night watch as they should have done (Mt. 13:25). The Lord foresaw this; He saw that the ultimate harvest wouldn't be a good one. Even some that looked like "good seed" would be rejected (Mt. 8:12 cp. 13:38). Yet in this same context, Christ speaks of how the believer starts off as a tiny mustard seed, but in the Kingdom grows into a tree which will shelter others (Mt. 13:32). He saw *how* small are our spiritual beginnings compared to our position in the Kingdom. The least in the Kingdom will be spiritually greater than John the Baptist was in his mortal life (Mt. 11:11). The false teachers "crept in" just as a serpent creeps (Jude 4). The same group may have been in Christ's mind in His parable of the tares being sown in the field of the (Jewish) world by the Devil, *secretly* (cp. "false [Jewish] brethren unawares brought in", Gal. 2:4-6). In the parable of the sower, "the Devil" is defined as the enemy of Christ the sower / preacher of the Gospel – and His enemies initially were the Jews. These were the "tares" sown amongst the wheat which Christ had sowed, "things that offend" – and Paul warns of the Judaizers who caused *offences* and schisms to wreck the ecclesia (Rom. 16:17; 14:13; Mt. 13:38,39,25,41). This is all confirmed by Jesus in Mt. 15:12-13 describing the Pharisees as plants "which My Heavenly Father hath not planted" which were to be rooted up at the judgment.

Mark's record speaks as if the *sower Himself* slept. The humility of the Lord Jesus is a reflection of the humility of God His Father. He spoke of Himself as the sower, who sleeps (in His death) and then works night and day (His present Heavenly labour for us) so that the seed should bring forth fruit- "He knows not how" (Mk. 4:27, with allusion to Ecc. 11:1,5,6). Despite all things having been revealed unto Him, and the Spirit immeasurably given to Him, He had the spiritual and intellectual humility to openly recognize that our spiritual growth and ultimate salvation is a mystery to Him. It was the Father alone who gave the increase. He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e.g. the date of His return, or the mystery of spiritual growth, Mk. 4:27), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

13:26 *Brought forth fruit*- See on :7. This is the "good ground" category of the previous parable. They were sown amongst thorns and yet all the same, brought forth fruit. It may be that the Lord intends us to perceive that one mark of spiritual maturity is that once we start to bring forth fruit, we realize that we are surrounded by weeds / thorns. But we cannot for sure judge any given individual as being in that category.

13:27 *From whence?*- To a Palestinian rural audience, the answer was obvious. Enemies sowing weeds amongst the wheat was a fairly common occurrence. The story is set up to make these

servants seem somehow foolish for not suspecting the obvious explanation. In the first instance, the Lord is addressing the problem the disciples were having as to why there was such mixed response to the Gospel. He's gently trying to explain to them that surely it was obvious why there wasn't better response- there was, clearly enough, a systematic campaign orchestrated by the Jews to damage the harvest.

13:28- see on 15:14.

Gather them- The term is used several times in the parables of Matthew 13, and in the context it effectively means 'to judge'. The gathering process is the judgment- not only because the process of gathering and judgment will likely be in a split second in terms of time as we understand it, but because our attitude in the moment when we know 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who go immediately will be saved, and those who delay to prepare themselves will thereby show themselves unworthy. "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" (Mt. 13:28) shows Christ's knowledge that this would be the desire of His servants throughout the generations. If we take His teaching seriously, we must come to the conclusion that all of us have a desire to "help" our brethren by 'sorting out' the weaknesses which we see in them, but that there is the real possibility that often this desire is spiritually grotesque in God's eyes. According to the parable of the tares, we are very sure that we know who are the tares and who are the wheat. But we can't be as sure as we feel, is the Lord's message. Some we feel are obviously tares are actually wheat. And the sensitivity of Jesus foresaw this so accurately. There's a fascinating twist in this story that is exactly descriptive of our experience. The servants slept first of all, after the word was first sown, and only once the wheat and tares came to bear fruit did they pester the Master to let them root up the tares. This reference to bearing fruit must be read in the context of the preceding parable of the sower, which describes how the good ground bears fruit (Mt. 13: 26, 8). The implication is that the servants shouldn't have been sleeping first of all, thinking there wasn't really much to do in the field. And so it is a familiar pattern: conversion is followed by a period of feeling there isn't much to do, and then the realization dawns that due to our own negligence in those early days there are some tares in the ecclesia. The desire to sort out the tares therefore comes some time *after* conversion. And on the overall level, there is another truism: the servants of Christ are keener to eradicate error than stop it in the first place. It's sad to see that there is almost a despising today of the warnings against 'the thin end of the wedge'; awareness of the possibility of apostasy is seen as somehow negative- exactly as the parable predicts. The parable implies that *if* a greater level of watchfulness was maintained by the servants, there wouldn't be the tares. But, as the Lord foresaw, we seem to lack this watchfulness, often under the guise of feeling that we must sort ourselves out rather than guard against apostasy being introduced. The sensitivity of Jesus constructed that parable with the aim of showing the thoughtful how deeply inappropriate is their desire to root up the tares. He clearly had in mind the prophecy of Himself in 2 Sam. 23:6,7: "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken by (human) hands: but the man that shall touch them (Christ) must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place (just outside Jerusalem) "where Christ was "fenced with iron". It isn't possible for us to uproot the tares because this can only possibly be done by the one who totally uprooted sin in Himself, dying to it on the cross. This association between Christ's right to judge and His victorious death is shown by the way the "tares" will be burnt in the same area as He was crucified in. Phil. 2:9-11 reasons along the same lines; because Christ died for us, He *therefore*

has the right to have every knee bowing to Him at the judgment. On account of being "the Son of man" and yet also being our perfect Messiah, He has the right *therefore* to be judge (Jn. 5:27 cp. Dan. 7:13,14). The Lord understood all this; and to the thoughtful, those who would grasp His allusion to 2 Sam. 23, He was saying: 'If you think you can root up the tares, if you think you have that wisdom to identify the tares, you are really insulting the greatness of what I achieved on the cross. It's only on account of that that I have the ability and right to divide wheat from tares, sheep from goats'. See on 7:4.

That we go- The emphasis is surely on the "we". They assumed that because they were the man's servants, they were therefore also the reapers. The contrast drawn between the servants and the reapers was an element of unreality in the story. For farmers didn't have a separate category of workers who were specifically "reapers". But this householder did, and the element of unreality points to the fact that contrary to what we intuitively think, the work of reaping is *not* for us. There are others, the Angels, who will do this. And the other element of unreality is that the householder wanted the weeds to continue to grow, even though they would be taking away moisture and nutrients from the good seed. This is the way the Lord wishes for things in this life. Those who offend, who cause the righteous to stumble, will only be removed from them at the last day (:41). The preceding parable of the sower had featured a type of ground where there were thorns who grew up and stopped the good seed from developing; but the point was that the 'good ground' category would still prosper *despite* growing next to weeds. Such was and is the power of God's word in Christ, that those who respond to it can still bring forth amazing yield *despite* the presence of the weeds next to them.

13:29 The message is that we can rightly sense that there are pseudo plants within the field, but we can never actually define any one individual as being one of them. The parable of the wheat and weeds features another unlikely happening. Someone sows weed seeds on top of the wheat seeds. The farm workers who were sleeping aren't upbraided as we might expect. The weeds can't be uprooted because the roots are intertwined; and anyone walking into the field to remove them would trample the wheat. So how, therefore, can they be rooted up at the time of the harvest? It can only be by some super-human reapers- i.e. the Angels. It is totally and utterly beyond *us* to do the uprooting. And yet this obvious meaning has still not been perceived by many of us.

13:30 The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). There is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The reapers- These are different to the 'servants' of :27. The implication is that we are the servants, and not the reapers. And yet the same word is used in Jn. 4:36-38 about how in preaching the Gospel, we are reaping people into the harvest of eternal life. As an exercise in Biblical exposition, this simply shows that a figure may be used in one context in an entirely different way, even with a completely opposite sense, to how it is used in another usage. And in yet another sense, we as it were reap ourselves according to how we sowed in this life (Gal. 6:7-9). And yet we shall be reaped by the Angels in the actual judgment process; the connection perhaps shows that effectively, we judge ourselves.

The time of harvest- The suggestion is that when the fruit is ready, then the harvest begins. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore variable; it depends upon the development of spiritual fruit by the last generation before His return.

In bundles- This detail is surely not merely incidental. The idea is that the wicked and righteous will be gathered together with others within their same category. Then, it will finally be clear who is who; they will be displayed together. There is the implication in the words of Christ to the angel/reapers that the unworthy will be destroyed together: "Gather together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles (i.e. together) to burn them". "*First*" here may well mean 'most importantly' rather than first in terms of time. It will be our Lord's desire to get the miserable business of destroying wilful sinners over and done with as quickly as possible- a far cry from the orthodox belief that Jesus somehow revels in the punishment of sinners. He can then concentrate on the joy of having the wheat gathered (together) into His barn (Mt. 13:30).

Into My barn- All these parables end with the impression that the faithful are going to be of eternal use to others, providing food / salvation for them. The 100 fold increase of the good ground was to be eaten, the wheat turned into bread or sown again, the mustard seed tree gives shelter to others, etc. We are to develop a desire to do that for others in this life, so that we might eternally do it in reality.

13:31 *Unto them-* Bearing in mind the Lord's earlier explanation that He was speaking to the Jewish masses in parables so that they would not understand, I wonder if the "them" here refers specifically to the disciples.

A grain- Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a farmer would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a field. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the field and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby

highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

Mustard seed- The mustard seed becomes a tree so big that all the birds of the air can live in it (Mk. 4:32). But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on 13:33. Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

13:32 *Least-* Gk. *mikros*, the tiniest. Mark adds that it was the tiniest of all seeds *in the earth* (Mk. 4:31). It was the tiniest seed known in the land- and the term often refers to the land promised to Abraham. It was the tiniest imaginable seed. And it would grow into the greatest imaginable tree. The point has been made that orchid and other seeds are actually smaller than mustard seeds (2). But the Bible is written from the perspective of its original hearers, it never claims to present global scientific truth, and the mustard seed was the smallest seed known to the Lord's audience.

Becomes a tree- Not 'grows into' a tree. The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree.

The greatest- The mustard bush is not the greatest herb and it is far from the tallest tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows... The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny beginnings of the Gospel. And yet the specific language of *the greatest* suggests the entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

The branches- Mark records that the Lord emphasized that the branches were "great", *meGas* (Mk. 4:32). The *mikro* seed became *meGa*; but the greatness of the tree was because of the greatness of the individual branches. A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.

There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

13:33 *Yeast-* This continues the theme of the preceding parable; which was about a *man*, and now He tells a similar story balanced out with a *woman* as the central figure. Again the point is that from tiny beginnings, great influence comes. And as a note in how to perform Biblical exegesis, we should learn here that because yeast is used negatively in some Bible passages, it doesn't *always* have to require that meaning. The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our humanity that we will influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. W.D. Davies quotes Pliny and the Mishnah, giving examples of the use of yeast as a *positive* symbol (3).

Hid- The teaching of Jesus works quietly from within- that could be the sense. Just as the tiny seed of the Gospel produces huge results finally, so the yeast of the Gospel has disproportionate influence. But we must give full weight to the Lord's other teachings about hiddenness. We are to become a city set on a hill which *cannot* be hid (Mt. 5:14; our good works "cannot be hid", 1 Tim. 5:25); it is the rejected who hide the talent of the Gospel so that nobody sees it (Mt. 25:25). Ultimately, the yeast hidden within us at the time of sowing the seed, at the time the yeast is first inserted into the dough, will become public. In the wider context of this section, the Lord is explaining to the disciples the tragedy of how the seed or yeast first sown by John the Baptist has not achieved its intended result- because people were still hiding it, as Joseph and Nicodemus did (Jn. 19:38 s.w.- Joseph was a 'secret' or 'hidden' disciple). And we find the same word just two verses later in Mt. 13:35- the Lord was now speaking forth publically things which had been 'hidden' (AV "kept secret") in the Old Testament period. The treasure was "hid" in the field of

the world, but the Lord Jesus gave all that He had so that He could redeem / buy the world, the field, and bring the hidden treasure to light (Mt. 13:44). Perhaps we could say that the yeast was only hidden to those who did not have eyes to see; for that has been the context of the Lord's teaching here (see on 13:10).

Till the whole- Until the flour was completely influenced. The hint could be that when the Gospel, the yeast, has done its complete work and the flour is finally completely leavened into a loaf- then the Lord will come. His work then will be complete. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore 'open' to some extent, just as the harvest is reaped only when the fruit (of the Spirit) has been brought forth.

Was leavened- It's tempting to see some connection with Paul's warning that false teachers must be removed from the church, because a little yeast leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). It could be that he is simply using the figure of yeast in a different sense. But his frequent allusions to the Gospels make us wonder whether he is consciously alluding to the Lord's teaching here in Mt. 13:33. It could be that he is saying 'Get rid of the *old* yeast, the yeast of false teaching and associated unspirituality- and instead, be influenced by the *true* yeast, of Christ's teachings rather than the yeast of *false* teaching'.

13:34 *In parables-* Mark adds that the Lord Jesus spoke the word to men "as they were able to hear it", not as He was able to expound it (Mk. 4:33). He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of the Synoptics. There is a tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed . There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right : wrong, truth : error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So

often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

Without a parable spake He not- See on 13:10. The idea surely is that *from now onwards* the Lord only spoke parables to them, which explains the shocked question of the disciples in :10 as to why there was this change of teaching method.

13:35 *That it might be fulfilled-* Again we see the Lord consciously trying to make the word flesh.

I will open my mouth in parables- Asaph in Psalm 78 seems to be saying that he was going to recount the history of Israel in order to reveal to his audience the hidden message of Israel's history; and he was not going to "hide" that message from them, but rather to 'declare' it and 'make it known': "I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, declaring to the generation to come the praises of Yahweh, His strength, and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a teaching in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children" (Ps. 78:1-5). And yet the Lord has been saying that He will teach in parables in order to hide, not declare and not make known God's Truth to the majority of Israel. But Psalm 78 says that He *will* declare these things. The point surely is that these truths were being declared, made known etc. *to the disciples*, but the very process would continue to hide them from Israel as a whole. The context of Ps. 78 is likely Asaph seeking to declare to Judah under Babylonian domination the meaning of their history and how Israel's history was to come to a climax and a full declaration of its meaning in Messiah. It therefore has relevance to the true Israel under Roman domination. Note that Ps. 78:2 is quoted here as it is in Jn. 6:31; Ps. 78 is alluded to at least 10 times in the N.T. The strongly uneven nature of quotation from the OT shows that some OT chapters were as it were proof texts for the early church; Ps. 110 is the clearest example.

Kept secret- See on 13:33 *hid*. Many of the Lord's parables portray the [preaching of] the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a kind of secret force: treasure hidden in a field, the tiniest seed in the garden, wheat growing among weeds, a pinch of yeast worked into dough, salt on meat... these are all images of something which works from within, changing other people in an ongoing, regular manner.

13:36 *Sent the multitude away-* Here we sense the power of the Lord's personality, able somehow to send a crowd of eager people away.

Into the house- The disciples only got the interpretation of the parables because they made the effort to go into the house and ask Him. Previously in this chapter the Lord has spoken of how blessed they are because they understand the parables, and how the crowds don't. But clearly effort had to be made to reach that understanding, it was not automatically beamed into them. They clearly didn't automatically understand the parables because they asked the Lord to "declare" or (Gk.) expound them to them. They do the same in Mt. 15:15.

13:37 *He that sows-* The present tense may suggest that the Lord was referring to the response to His preaching there and then.

The Son of Man- But it also refers to any preacher. If we are in Christ, then in our preaching, we are Him to this world.

The field- The emphasis is repeatedly on the fact that it is *His* field (:24,27,31). The Lord often speaks as if He has already overcome the world, even though the cross was still future for Him. So confident was He that the Father would bring Him through to inherit all things.

The world- In the first instance, the Jewish world.

The children of the Kingdom- We would expect the good seed to represent God's word, as it does in the earlier parable of the sower. And in a sense, it does; but the word becomes flesh in those who truly respond to it, and therefore the Lord interprets it as individual believers. Being 'children of' something suggests that we have that thing as our family of origin, our parent. And this is how we should feel towards the things of God's Kingdom. "The Kingdom" is placed in contrast with "the wicked one". The plants are the children or offspring of whoever sowed them. The weeds were sown by the wicked one, and the good seed were sown by the Lord Jesus; but He is styled "the Kingdom" in that as King of that Kingdom, this is a legitimate title for Him. He was and is the essence of the Kingdom.

13:38 *The good seed-* It is our attitude to God's word which is the fundamental indicator of our spirituality. The sower parable teaches this by its equation of the seed / word and the types of ground. In the next (but related) parable of the tares, "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38)- i.e. the seed / word is people. In the sower parable, we read of "He which received seed by the way side" (Mt. 13:19), connecting the believer with a type of ground which receives the seed, whilst Lk.8:12,13 speak of the people as the seeds rather than the types of ground: "Those (seeds) by the way side are they... they on the rock are they...". Mt.13:19 speaks of people receiving seed by the way side, but Mk. 4:15 likens their *heart* to the way side, where the seed was sown. In God's sight, a person *is* his heart or way of thinking (Prov. 23:7); and to God, a person's attitude to the word *is* his mind.

The RV translates the parable of the sower as if the seed sown is the convert: "he that was sown..." (Mt. 13:19 RV). And later on in Mt. 13:38 we are told so again: "the good seed are the

children of the Kingdom”. Yet the seed was a symbol of the word of God. The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (Is. 55:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Is this parable only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man’s rejection? Thus the word of God was ‘made void’ by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?)... This is perhaps one of the most defiantly unanswerable questions in our experience. As an aside, one possible explanation is that “the word” which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God’s intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the ‘prospering’ of the Servant in His work: Is. 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: “...until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished”. Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God’s word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 AVmg., where we read that “the man clothed with linen”- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- “returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me”. The word ‘returned’ in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren’t. We must believe, really and truly, that the word will not return void, but it will accomplish what it is intended to achieve. We are not scattering seed with the vague hope that something might sprout up; we are planting, fully expecting to see a harvest. “The word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24) surely means that the number of converts to the word multiplied- for the same word is repeatedly used in this sense (Acts 6:1,7; 5:14; 9:31; 19:20). Thus “the word of God” is put by metonymy for ‘the response to the word of God’, as if the word will inevitably bring forth response.

The wicked one- I have demonstrated throughout the exposition of this chapter, beginning with the parable of the sower, that the adversary to the growth of the word of Jesus in the first century was initially the Jewish system. They are here personified as 'the wicked one'. And the noun is used elsewhere in this context by the Lord; He speaks of not resisting the evil one [s.w.] when the disciples were hit on the cheek, which was distinctly a synagogue punishment for uttering heresy (Mt. 5:39). Judaism understood 'the wicked one' as a personal Satan figure, but the Lord is redefining it- as they themselves. On a wider scale, the New Testament does this masterfully, redefining the common understanding of 'Satan', the adversary, the wicked one, as a personification of you yourself. The Lord specifically defines the Jewish religious leaders as 'the wicked one' in Mt. 7:11: "If you then, being evil [Gk. 'the wicked one']...". Earlier that same day (Mt. 13:1) the Lord had three times called them "evil ones" and an "evil generation", using the same word *poneros* (Mt. 12:34,39,45; John's Gospel likewise records the Lord calling the Jewish world "evil" in Jn. 3:19; 7:7). They were the personification of 'the wicked one' because they had 'evil' [s.w.] in their hearts (Mt. 9:4 "why do you think evil in your hearts?"); for moral 'evil' comes from the heart (Mt. 15:19). Later in this chapter He uses the word to speak of how the 'wicked ones' will be separated from the righteous at the last day (Mt. 13:49). Clearly 'the wicked ones' are people- and not supernatural beings. Note how the very same word and grammatical

construction is used to describe a church member as "the wicked one" (1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:2). The term does not of itself require any reference to a supernatural being.

We shouldn't seek to over-interpret every element of a parable- although such approaches often yield very fruitful lessons. Indeed, here is the difference between parables and allegories- an allegory requires every symbol to be interpreted, but parables aren't like this. It's a different genre. The focus is often on the end stress, not the details of the parable itself. And so I submit that rather do we need to seek to perceive the main issues which the Lord is seeking to get over to us, through these special features of His stories. Indeed, when the Lord *does* give interpretations of His parables, He doesn't give interpretations of every feature which formed the furniture of the parable. When He gives quite a detailed interpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares, He doesn't comment on the significance of the servants sleeping, the barn, the *bundling* of the weeds, etc.

13:39 *The enemy*- The Lord uses the same word in Lk. 19:27 to describe how the Jews who refused the Gospel were the Lord's "enemies". Paul likewise uses it to speak of how the unbelieving Jews are "enemies" (Rom. 11:28).

The Devil- see on :38.

The harvest- The Lord used the same metaphor in Mt. 9:37,38 in speaking of how during that earlier part of His ministry, the harvest was ongoing and He was sending out the disciples to reap the harvest; at that time, the Lord could say that "the fields are white already to harvest" (Jn. 4:35); the disciples were sent out to harvest it (Jn. 4:38 s.w., AV "to reap", literally 'to harvest'). But now He speaks of the harvest as being at a considerable distance in time from where they were now located- "the end of the age". This could be an example of the 'now but not yet' theme, whereby the language of the Lord's return and future Kingdom is used about our present experience. But in line with my observations about the abrupt change in the Lord's attitude to Israel at the end of chapter 12 (see on 13:1,10), it seems to me that He now considered that the time of harvest had been delayed. The parable of the sower earlier in the chapter had taught that the crop would only be reaped "when the harvest is come" (Mk. 4:29). This likewise was an implicit statement that the time of harvest in Mt. 9:37,38 had now been delayed. And one of the factors was not simply that the fruit was not ready, but that there had been insufficient labourers to harvest it (Mt. 9:38). Likewise the parable of the weeds suggests that weakness amongst the Lord's servants had led to the problem being experienced- if they had not slept, then the enemy would not have sown the weeds (Mt. 13:25). This is perhaps why towards the end of His ministry, the Lord taught that *He personally* was going to do the harvesting, albeit assisted by the Angels (Mt. 25:26 "I harvest", s.w.; AV "reap"); see on :41.

The end of the world- The Greek *aion* means 'age', and so there is no suggestion here of the destruction of planet earth. The disciples impatiently asked when this would be, using the same

term (Mt. 24:3). The phrase is only used outside Matthew in Heb. 9:26, where we read that the Lord's death on the cross was "the end of the age"- and this is part of an argument that the Mosaic age has ended and should not be, as it were, lived in any longer. Paul uses a related phrase in 1 Cor. 10:11 to describe how his generation lived at a time when the ends of the ages had *already come*. Paul was writing before AD70. In neither of these references is there any suggestion that 'the end of the age' was in AD70; rather the reference is to the Lord's death on the cross, which ended the Mosaic age. The Lord defines "the end of the age" more specifically in Mt. 13:40 as "the end of *this* age"- the period in which He was then living, which was the Mosaic age. The significance of the events of AD70 appears to me to have been overstated and over interpreted by many expositors. I suggested that "the harvest" was possible in the first part of the Lord's ministry, but He delayed it because of Israel's lack of fruit and a lack of faithful harvesters. He delayed to 'the end of the age'- His death on the cross. But the harvest didn't happen then either. God's ultimate appeal, indeed the ultimate appeal of Jesus Himself, was in His death, in His body hanging upon the cross for all to see, and in His resurrection. But that appeal went unheeded by Israel. And so it seems to me that the time of harvest has again been delayed, to the final end of the age at His second coming. The great preaching commission includes the promise of the Lord's personal presence with and support to His preachers "until the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20); the implication could be that the new age which the Lord had in mind would be terminated by the Gospel being preached into all the world. This naturally connects with the Lord's teaching that the Gospel "shall be preached in all the world... and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14). He doesn't define "the end". The end of what? Surely "the end of the age" which He had taught about here in Mt. 13:39. But the "end" is therefore without a specific chronological terminus- because it depends upon whether the preachers take the Gospel to all the world. Perhaps He didn't say specifically "the end of the age" in Mt. 24:14 because He realized that His death would be the end of one age, the Mosaic age, but the final end of the age would depend, to use His earlier metaphor, upon the ripening of the harvest and the zeal of the preachers to harvest it.

The reapers are the Angels- "The reapers" means literally 'the harvesters'. The same word has been used for how the disciples were sent to harvest in the earlier part of the Lord's ministry. The suggestion could be that this is all part of the Lord's changed program- now, it is no longer the disciples who would reap, but the Angels would. Note how the Lord's parable of labourers in the vine harvest suggests He had a chronic problem getting enough workers- the owner is desperate to get absolutely anybody to do a bit of work in that harvest, paying men a day's wage if they only worked one hour. And connect this with how the Lord prayed and asked others to pray that more labourers would be sent out to harvest (Mt. 9:38).

The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay.

This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves.

13:40 *The weeds*- These are the same weeds of the sower parable, who choke the response of people to the message of Christ, initially in the form it was preached by John the Baptist. They refer to *people*; yet the similar parable of Mt. 25:41 speaks of how the devil and his angels, his followers, are to be burnt in fire. The devil and his angels therefore refer in the first context to the individuals and collective system behind them which have discouraged response to Christ. The 'angels' of Mt. 25:41 are the weed category of people defined here in chapter 13.

The fire- I suggested in the above commentary on :39 that the harvest began earlier in the Lord's ministry, but He recalculated His program and delayed it. Likewise the idea of a gathering of and destruction of the wicked in "fire" is clearly taken from the Lord's earlier teaching that the fruitless trees were even then being cut down and were about to be thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19- note the tenses), which was in turn repeating the words of John the Baptist, who predicted that in the ministry of the Jesus whom he was announcing, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor and he will gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). Note again the tenses- this was about to happen, the winnowing fan was already in the hand of the Lord Jesus. But now, the Lord reschedules that judgment and burning until "the end of the age", and urges the disciples to allow the weeds to grow in the field and just wait until Divine judgment comes. Again, it would be possible to understand all this as part of the nexus of 'now but not yet' language we find in the New Testament; in a sense, that fire was "already kindled" by human rejection of the message (Lk. 12:49), and we can even now drag men out of that fire (Jude 23). But the context of Matthew 13 is without doubt a change in program by the Lord, and I therefore prefer to see this change in timing as part of His rescheduling of His program. In the past, God Himself had clearly reinterpreted and rescheduled His prophetic intentions with Israel and various Gentile nations (e.g. Nineveh), and so this should not strike us as unusual. Indeed in these last days it could well be that there were various times in the 20th Century when prophetically, the stage was set for the Lord's return; but there was again a rescheduling, partly because of the poorness of the harvest, and partly because of the reluctance of His people to go out and gather it, preferring instead to squabble amongst themselves and chase their own tails over the finer points of Biblical interpretation.

13:41 *The son of man*- A term often associated with the Lord in His role as final judge, for due to having fully had human nature, He thereby has the right to judge men (Jn. 5:27).

Send forth His Angels- Practically and concretely, how will we be gathered to judgment? How? When? It seems that the Angels will suddenly appear to us in the course of our mundane lives, and invite us to go to meet Christ. "The reapers" of the harvest "are the angels"; it is they who

will gather the believers, and then divide them into wheat and tares (Mt. 13:40-42). As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment.

The Greek *apostello* ("send forth") is earlier used of the Lord sending forth the apostles / disciples to gather the harvest (Mt. 10:5,16,40; 20:2; Mk. 3:14). But now the Lord is rescheduling His program, perhaps due to the weakness of the disciples in doing the work (see on :39 *The harvest*); instead of them doing the work, He would do it, at the end of the age, through His Angels. The same word is used in the preceding sower parable, of how the sickle is 'sent forth' to gather the harvest when it is ripe (Mk. 4:29). Such rescheduling is common in God's working with men. Earlier, the Father had 'sent forth' prophets at the time of harvest- but they had not been given any fruit; and therefore He sent His Son (Mk. 12:2 s.w.). The same word is used about how at "supper time", when all things of the Kingdom were "ready", servants were "sent" to bring the guests (Israel) to the table (Lk. 14:17); but they refused.

It is not until the harvest that they are sent out to root out of the Kingdom all things that offend. There is a sense in which the Angels have limited knowledge about our spiritual capacities; "We are made a spectacle... to Angels" (1 Cor. 4:9) implies that the Angels look on at the sufferings God has brought on us through our guardian Angel, and intensely scrutinize how we are acting as if earnestly watching a theatre play (so the word "spectacle" implies). Thus they are anxiously looking for the outcome of their trials on us, not knowing the final result. The fact that only at the judgement will the names of the worthy be confessed to the Angels by Jesus (Rev. 3:5) makes it appear that the ultimate outcome of our probation is not known to our guardians, hence their eagerness in our lives to see how we react.

It seems that when Christ first comes, He sends *His* Angels to gather us (Mt. 13:41), and it is also His Angels which punish the wicked (Mt. 13:41); however it is God's Angels which reward the righteous (there seems a distinction between the Angels of God and of Christ). The Angels of Christ bring us to Him with their report on us, and He then makes the decision- those same Angels are told to arrange the destruction of their charge if unworthy, whilst the worthy are confessed to the Angels of God for glorification.

All things that offend- Literally, 'All that offend'. The sentence continues: "And *them* which do iniquity". The reference is to *people*, those weeds who stopped others growing, in the terms of the parable of the sower. Causing stumbling to others is clearly a major sin in the Lord's eyes, and we need to give His perspective its full weight in assessing the likely impact of our dealings with others. To cause others to stumble, to offend them, leads to condemnation with a millstone around the neck; but we can do that *in this life*, be condemned for it, and yet whilst there is life- we can repent. For Peter was one such who potentially caused another (none less than the Lord)

to stumble (Mt. 16:23). We note that it is the Jewish world whom the Lord saw as full of offence / stumbling (Mt. 18:7). In our day it is those who cause division who cause others thereby to stumble (Rom. 16:17); for even the whiff of division is what is so spiritually carcinogenic to new converts and indeed to us all. Causing others to stumble from the path to the Kingdom is the leading characteristic of the condemned, according to the Lord's words in Mt. 13:41. Compare His words: "It is inevitable that offences come; but woe to that man by whom they come" with "The son of man goes as it is written of him; but woe to that man (Judas) by whom the son of man is betrayed!". The Lord sees those who cause offence as being as bad as Judas. It's serious. We are the body of Christ. It has been truly said that Jesus has no face, no hands, no legs on this earth apart from us. Positively, this means that we beseech men and women "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV).

The Kingdom is here described by the Lord as a time when all those in the ecclesia who cause others to stumble will have been thrown away into condemnation (Mt. 13:41). Yet in some things we all offend others (James 3:2). Our places in the Kingdom will therefore be by pure grace alone; but we must respond to this wonder by *trying* as earnestly as possible to only upbuild and not to stumble our brethren. A personally 'righteous' believer may well be excluded from the Kingdom for the effect he has had on others. Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having 'driven out' Israel from their land (Jer. 23:2,3,8); the pastors' sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken.

Them which do iniquity- Not necessarily a separate category to 'all who offend'. To cause others to stumble is the essence of 'doing iniquity'. And we can make others stumble passively; for attitude and unspoken messages have huge effect upon others' spirituality. *Anomia*, "iniquity", is literally 'not-law'. Yet again the Lord is driving home the paradox- the legalistic, law-following Jews were in fact not keeping the Law. The Lord specifically states that the Pharisees are "full of iniquity" (Mt. 23:28 s.w.). And in Mt. 24:12 He again defines 'iniquity' as being damaging to others- the abounding of 'iniquity' causes "the love (*agape*) of many [to] become cold". And in our own times, this is clearly seen; legalistic attitudes cause that vital *agape* love to disappear from individuals and communities of believers.

13:42 *Furnace of fire*- Defined in 13:50 as *the* furnace of fire. The reality and picture of final condemnation was so clearly in the Lord's mind so often. He saw clearly where disbelief in Him and legalistic behaviour was going to ultimately lead. To Jewish minds, the idea of being cast into a fiery furnace on a King's orders obviously recalls Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being cast into such a furnace in Daniel 3. This incident was held up in militant Judaism of the time as the ultimate example for Israel in their struggle against the Gentile world. But, the Lord is saying, there will be no deliverance for you. *The* furnace begs for Biblical identification with Sodom and Egypt both being described as "the furnace" (Gen. 19:28; Dt. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4); and yet Jerusalem was to become "the furnace" when burnt by Babylon (Ez. 22:18,20,22). The punishment of the rejected will be to be treated as this world, "condemned with the world"

(1 Cor. 11:32), sharing Babylon's judgment of having a millstone around her neck and being cast into the sea of the world. But Judaism's strongest theme was their much vaunted separation from the Gentile world. And yet they were to be judged as the very world they hated, because in essence their legalism brought them to the same moral position as that world, and even far worse.

Wailing and gnashing of teeth- A phrase so often used by the Lord (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). He evidently had the vision of the last day judgment before Him. Here, as so often, it serves well to consider in what tone of voice He spoke. His passion for the lost and urgent desire to save from condemnation lead us to wonder if He spoke these words almost in tears, knowing what was coming. The desolation of the rejected would be so deep because they would then realize the eternal future they could have had. When He spoke of blessedness for those who weep now (Lk. 6:21), the Lord surely meant 'those who weep for the wretchedness of their own spiritual failure, who recognize how worthy they are of condemnation and feel it as if it had happened'. In contrast, those who wish to appear so spiritually wonderful before men will "weep" in the last day- they will be condemned (Lk. 6:25 s.w.). Peter likewise wept in this life after denying the Lord, experiencing the condemnation of going out from the Lord into darkness with shame; but repented and will be saved.

13:43 *Shine forth as the sun*- The second coming of Christ as Malachi's "sun of righteousness" is a clear Bible theme. At the transfiguration, a clear vision of the Kingdom age, the Lord's face shone as the sun (Mt. 17:2); and it is He personally who shall shine forth to all at His second coming (Lk. 17:24). The Lord is saying that we will then be openly revealed as Him. But "shine forth" translates *ek-lampo*; and we are to be a visible *lampo* right now, shining in a way which cannot be hid from men (Mt. 5:15,16). Again and again, we find the Lord's later teaching so often rooted in the Sermon on the Mount. Our shining before men now is related to our shining eternally in the age to come. The other clear OT allusion is to Dan. 12:3- those who turn many to righteousness shall shine eternally. The opposite to causing others to stumble (and being condemned for it) is to teach others righteousness (and be saved). We cannot therefore be somehow in a neutral position, doing nobody any evil and yet nobody much good either. We are either making them stumble or turning them to righteousness.

In the Kingdom- Contrary to how some wish to interpret things, the Lord did understand "the Kingdom" to have a future aspect; for He speaks of how "then... in the Kingdom" the righteous will shine as the sun. The shining of the sun was to give light on earth, and this basic reason for the sun is mentioned often in the Bible. In some way, we shall eternally give light to others; and this aspect of the Kingdom life must begin in us now. Even in the future Kingdom, the basis of our witness to the world will be that we are in Christ. Thus Micah's description of how "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass" (Mic. 5:7) is consciously alluding to the then-famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:6: "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth". The blessings Messiah brings are to be articulated through the witness of those in Him. Those who

have lived in Him will then shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. 12:3). But the description of the Lord's face shining as the sun draws on this; as if to say that our shining in the future Kingdom will be because we were and are in Him. We will shine forth then (Mt. 13:43), as the Sun of righteousness Himself.

Who has ears to hear, let him hear- The Lord has earlier in this chapter told the disciples that His audiences generally did not have ears to hear; but the disciples do. This would therefore be an invitation to the disciples specifically to use the potential for understanding which they had. They were to continue shining; for the context of this whole long day's teaching (see on 13:1) was that they were weary in their witness because of opposition and lack of response.

13:44 *Treasure hid in a field-* This mini parable, and the next one about the man seeking to buy pearls, presents things to us from the perspective of the Lord Jesus. He had just taught that "The field is the world" (:38). Who bought / redeemed the world? The Lord Jesus. It is "*His* field" (13:27,31). When did the Lord "buy" (this is the word usually translated "redeem") the world? In His death on the cross, which cost Him all that He had. We note that the parable puts the focus on the joy of the obtaining rather than all that was given up and lost. Surely Paul alludes here when he writes that we are "bought [s.w.] with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and should act and feel accordingly. Why did the Lord do this? Because within "the world" there was "treasure"- us, those who are finally His special personal possession. Here we see neatly explained the difference between the Lord's redemption of the whole world, "all men", and yet personal salvation only being experienced by a few hidden within the world, His "treasure". Rev. 5:9 may have this in mind when speaking of how the saved were "redeemed [s.w. "bought"] by [Christ's] blood out of every tribe, language, people and nation". But to save *us* He had to redeem the world, purchase the field. Yet we are 'hidden' in the world; not that our faith is to be invisible, but insofar as we are a minority. This again was in the context of encouraging the disciples that the poor response to their message in the Jewish world was nothing to be unduly discouraged by. The world- and perhaps the Lord had in view the *Jewish* world for whom Christ primarily died (Gal. 4:4,5)- was to be bought by Christ in His death, but only a few would respond and be 'found' as His treasure. Again, we find "treasure" mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. The principle that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21) applied to the Lord- His heart is totally with us. And there is to be a mutuality between a man and his Lord; if we are our Lord's treasure, then we are not to lay up treasure on earth, but rather have Him as *our* treasure (Mt. 6:19,20) just as we are *His* treasure. Paul seems to play around with this idea of 'hid treasure', for he uses the same Greek words twice. But each time, slightly differently. He speaks of how we the light of God's glory has *shone* in our hearts, using the very same word as in Mt. 13:43 about the righteous shining as the sun in the Kingdom; but he then says that this "treasure" is hidden in the "earthen vessels" of our own bodies (2 Cor. 4:6,7). Just as we as a community are 'hidden' in the soil of the field / the world, so actually the real essence of our relationship with Christ is likewise hidden within all the dust of our own personal humanity. This is not to say that we can relax and justify worldly living as being merely 'the flesh'. But it is a comfort that the

Bible teaching here recognizes that our real spiritual essence is indeed 'hidden' in the dust and ashes of all we have to do as we go about life in the flesh in this present world. Again, as it were playing with the ideas, Paul speaks of how "In Christ are *hid* all the *treasures* of wisdom" (Col. 2:3). There is no very obvious semantic connection with the Lord's teaching about us being His treasure hid in this world. So perhaps this is one of Paul's many unconscious allusions to the Gospels, whereby he had the words so deeply in his consciousness that they influenced his thinking and writing both consciously and unconsciously. For more examples of this, see my discussion of the issue in *Bible Lives*.

Has found- In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had put the emphasis upon *us* seeking and finding the way to life (Mt. 7:7,8,14; 16:25). Yet He is also searching for us; He speaks of how He 'found' faith in a Gentile man, and had been seeking to find such faith in Israel (Mt. 8:10 s.w.). The Lord told parables of Himself as the good shepherd seeking and *finding* the lost (Lk. 15; Mt. 18:13 s.w.), of Him seeking and *finding* workers for His work (Mt 20:6), wanting to *find* fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19; Lk. 13:7), *finding* people to come to the marriage supper (Mt. 22:9,10). This is why when the searching Lord finds the man searching for Him, there is a spark of mutuality which makes all the Angels of the cosmos rejoice. Thus the same words are used about the early disciples 'finding' Christ, and Him 'finding' them (Jn. 1:41,43). We may justifiably speak of our search for God, for Jesus, for "the truth", but the reality is that the Father and Son were in search of *us*. The Hebrew prophets likewise present God as in search of man, and not simply awaiting our approach to Him if we wish to make it, with passive emotionless indifference. The Lord is saying that His death on the cross would not be simply to die for the world; it was because He had 'found' the treasure of believers. But who did He find? A small group of mixed young men, one time prostitutes and a few Gentiles. That was enough. His finding of *them* motivated Him to die for the world that He might save *them*. In this we have a window onto the apparent 'wastage' of God; that the whole world was redeemed just for the sake of a few. Some argue for universal salvation on this basis- that why should Christ have died to save just a few. But the parable is clear- it was for joy at having found the minority, which were to Him a priceless treasure, He bought the entire field- just to get them. This is the waste and abandon that comes with love, and only a utilitarian, pragmatic, loveless legalist would question its authenticity, credibility or necessity. So the Lord is encouraging His dispirited disciples that He has found them, and He rejoices over them with love and devotion; and they have found Him. That the rest of the world haven't responded cannot take anything away from this experience.

He hides- It seems that He hides the treasure, although it could mean that He hides Himself. Hiding the treasure gives the impression of an intensely personal relationship between Him and the treasure which He can't share with others. Or if He hides Himself for a period before going to buy the field, we likewise get the impression of a man overcome with an intense sense of in-loveness which only He can understand. This is how He felt about the disciples. It could be in the context of 13:10-15 (see notes there) that He means that He is hiding Himself from the world by

telling them parables from now on; and instead will focus on giving His all to get the disciples and the few with "ears to hear" as His special treasure. He is thus putting a far more positive slant on His realization of how Israel generally have rejected Him, only a minority have accepted Him, and Israel had not accepted her king, nor John's ministry, and so Yahweh's glory was not going to come to Zion as envisaged. The Lord is saying that He has so fallen in love with the remnant who *had* responded, that He felt a joy so great that He would give all He had to redeem the whole world in order to save them. And this is in keeping with His teaching in the previous parables- that the wonder of the few good seeds who respond amazingly, of the wheat that grows so well despite the weeds, is such that all the loss, rejection and casualty is worth it.

If we really want to make encounters and conversations work, we need to consider who we're talking with. The Lord's parables of Mt. 13:44-49 make it clear that people have different motivations when they first encounter our preaching. Some are merely fish caught in the Gospel net and compelled to come in; others are as the merchant man who is searching for good pearls, who sells all he has to get that pearl and just have it, gazing at it with admiration and appreciation each day; others are as the man who finds something of value in a field, maybe he sees there's some precious raw material he can exploit there, and so he buys the field in order to get some benefit for himself. The strange (to my ears) comment in Mt. 13:44 that the man 'hides' his discovery appears to contradict the reality that we should joyfully share our discovery of Christ with others. Perhaps the picture is being painted of a man with all the wrong motivations, who comes to the treasure from the viewpoint of 'What can I selfishly get out of this' (it may be in our age... a desire for welfare support, a partner, a social club...). And yet all the same he has come to the treasure, been called to it, allowed to find it... that is perhaps the point. All these types of people have differing motivations, and need to be treated differently by us.

The man who finds treasure [or, perhaps, a deposit of precious metal in a field which could be mined] *hides the fact* (Mt. 13:44), and sells all he has to buy that field. The hiding of the discovery speaks to me of the utterly personal knowledge between a man and his Lord which we enter into when we 'find' the treasure of the Kingdom, the pearl of great price. For any man or woman who hears the Lord's words, He and His Father will enter in and make their abode with them (Jn. 14:23). Although we are a great multitude of redeemed, yet the communication of the Father and Son to us are still amazingly unique, even though we all hear and read the same actual words, and reflect upon the same facts. Right back at the beginning of God's relationship with Israel He had made the point that "I will meet you [plural] to speak there unto thee [you singular]" (Ex. 29:42).

For joy thereof- This is the joy of the in-love Jesus, so excited at having found the remnant, the treasure in the field of the unbelieving world, so excited He hides Himself for a while, or hides the treasure from others' view. One of the motives behind His endurance of the cross (which was how the field of the world was bought / redeemed) was "joy". Not joy in the sense of giggling and happy-clappy; but "joy" in the sense that He could speak of "My joy" just hours before beginning the ordeal (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). The parables of Luke 15 describe the Lord's joy as being

in relation to finding the lost, and this was what had happened in the Lord's 'finding' of the disciples and responsive remnant.

Sells all that he has- These very words are used by the Lord in teaching that the rich ruler should sell all that he has- and give to the poor (Lk. 18:22). The Lord wasn't asking the man to do anything that He Himself was not doing. His giving to the poor was in giving redemption to *us*. And the Lord was a "cheerful giver"; He gave up all "with joy" for us; and in the first instance, to die for that small group of mixed up men and women who tagged around with Him. "Sells *all*" might suggest He was wealthy; seeing that the Lord was not a wealthy man, we wonder what this 'wealth' was which He gave up, recalling Paul's comment that He who was rich became poor for our sakes on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). What did He 'give up' or 'sell'? What was His real loss? Perhaps it was that as God's Son He could personally have been saved without the cross, but He did all He did in order to save us- and thus set the ultimate example of overcoming selfishness.

The man who sells all to buy the field containing the treasure (Mt. 13:44)- what does he *do* with his newly found wealth? The question, of course, bids us reflect what we have done with the wealth of the Gospel which we have found. These open-ended parables with unanswered questions are left hanging because the point is, it all depends upon our response as to how they end in our cases! The parables are thus not just cosy stories. They challenge our response. Our tidy images of reality are shattered by the open endings and elements of unreality in the parables. Our minds are arrested and teased by them, as they lead us to self-realization, self-knowledge, at times even healthy self-condemnation. The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man's five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn't allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow's complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life's work...? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially... And yet we are left to reflect upon this.

13:45 *A merchant man*- A traveler, for that is the essence of the Greek word translated "merchant". He was going around seeking- just as Jesus was in search of believing hearts. Paul saw himself as the man who gives all to buy the pearl (Mt. 13:45,46 = Phil. 3:7,8; although this passage also alludes to Moses; as if he took inspiration from Moses to be like the man in the parable). He saw the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as the pearl whose beauty inspired even a rich man to give up all that he had. Paul took comfort, real comfort, from the way he found himself in situations similar to those of his Lord.

Seeking- Elsewhere the Lord speaks of Himself as *seeking* (s.w.) the lost- the lost coin, sheep and son (Lk. 15; 19:10 s.w.). Those rather unfortunate people were beautiful pearls to the Lord, and that is how He sees the irritating self-righteous ones, the alcoholics, the druggies, the lazy, the socially awkward... whom He so seeks as His precious treasure. We are to seek Him and His Kingdom and His Father (Mt. 6:33; 7:7,8). And yet He seeks us. Hence there is some kind of 'flash' when we meet, a flash which is felt throughout the cosmos, in which *all* the Angels of Heaven rejoice. The Lord was seeking fruit on the Jewish fig tree (Lk. 13:6 s.w.) and found none; but just one response was as it were a "pearl" for the Lord. Thus the Lord is presented as 'seeking' individuals who respond, often from very bad life situations. John puts this in more spiritual terms in recording how the Lord 'seeks' God's glory (Jn. 7:18), alluding to how Moses sought the same glory in more visible terms. The repentance of that unlikely minority is the very essence of Yahweh's glory.

Goodly pearls- Perhaps the tension is between His seeking for pearls in the plural, but being so thrilled to find just one (:46), for which he was prepared to give all. This would be in the spirit of the preceding parables; that the beauty of the response of a minority is such that it makes the failure to redeem the others seem less hard. This merchant didn't find the many pearls he had intended to find; but he was so thrilled to find just one beautiful one that he would give all he had just to get it, and presumably, to end his business life and just sit and admire the pearl. For the question 'And what did he do next?' seems to require that kind of answer. For what he did wasn't the wise thing to do in business terms. It is the element of unreality in the little story. Note the use of pearls as representative of believers in Rev. 21:21; and see the note on "pearls" under Mt. 7:6.

13:46 *Found one-* He was thrilled with just one, even though He began seeking pearls in the plural (:45). The combination of 'seeking' and 'finding' beyond question is to be connected with the Lord's teaching about His seeking and finding of wayward individuals (Lk. 15 and see on :45; the same Greek word for "find" is used a significant seven times in the parables of Lk. 15). This strange little story could be making the simple point that if the Lord saved only one person, He would be thrilled by that. This is all directly in the context of this chapter, in which the Lord is discussing the general lack of response to Him, and comforting His flagging preachers in the disillusion which arises from little response to the Gospel. The Lord had taught that we should seek and be assured that we will find, in spiritual terms. All of His teaching He spoke to Himself, and He was the word of His own teaching made flesh. *His* understanding of seeking with the assurance of finding was that if we seek for persons to respond, we will find. Even if only one person. This surely should be our daily prayer- that we will be led to meet the right people, that our seeking for others will result in at least one being found.

Great price- As the King of the Kingdom, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" can in some ways be applied to the Lord personally. Having spoken of how "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38), the Lord goes straight on to speak of how "the Kingdom of Heaven" is like a man who gives all that he has so that he can buy or redeem a field in which He perceives treasure. The same man is also

likened to a merchant who sells all that he has in order to buy a pearl of great price. In the utter bankruptcy, the selling all to obtain or redeem one thing, we surely see a parable of the cross, through which death the Lord Jesus redeemed the field of the world, and the pearl of great price [to Him]. Perhaps Paul had his eye on these parables when he spoke of how in the cross, the Lord Jesus who had been rich became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9). That pearl, that treasure hidden within the field of the world, then becomes symbolic of us. It was of "great price" (Mt. 13:46)- and Paul again may have this in mind when he warns that we "are bought with a price" (using a related Greek word) and should therefore serve the Lord who bought us and not anyone else (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Thus we see not only the cost of our redemption, the utter self-emptying of the Lord in His time of dying; but also a picture of how valuable we are to Him. We also see some outline explanation of the way in which the Lord's death redeemed "the world", and yet we are His special treasure hidden within it. In one sense we as His treasure is still hidden within this world; in another sense of course we are to be as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. We should be concerned at the danger of hiding our light under a bucket; but in another sense, our relationship to the Lord is such that it is by its wonderful nature 'hidden' from the world in which we currently lie. The strange feature of Mt. 13:44- that the man (in this interpretation, the Lord Jesus) 'hides' the treasure- perhaps becomes understandable in terms of Col. 2:3, which speaks of the Lord Jesus as having all God's treasures 'hidden' in Himself. The 'man' bought the field "for joy thereof" (Mt. 13:44); and despite all the pressure of the crucifixion process, the Lord Jesus could still speak at that time of "my joy" in our redemption (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). Just as the merchant man was "seeking" pearls and 'found' one of great price, so the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus, 'seeks' [same Greek word] fruit on the fig tree (Lk. 13:6), 'seeks' the lost coin until it is found (Lk. 15:8), 'seeks' and saves that which was lost (Lk. 19:10) and 'seeks' His sheep until He finds them (Mt. 18:12). The 'finding' of the lost sheep, the pearl of great price, in some sense happened in the Lord's death. Hence He pictures Himself as the shepherd carrying the redeemed sheep on His shoulders with head bowed forward- exactly the posture of a man carrying a crossbar on his shoulders.

Sold all that he had- The very same phrase is used by the Lord in speaking of how the hopelessly indebted man was sold "and all that he had" (Mt. 18:26). The picture is of absolute and total destitution from selling every imaginable possession. This story does indeed have a strange twist to it. A rich man so loved a pearl which he saw that he became a pauper by selling absolutely *all* he had- his business, his transport, his expensive clothes- in order to buy a pearl. And, finishing off the story, we are to surely imagine him living the rest of his life in some humble dwelling amongst the poor of this world, daily admiring the beauty of his pearl, totally unrealized by the world around him, caring for it as the most important thing in his whole existence, realizing that in it was the epitome of absolutely all his being: his love, his wealth, his future, his joy of life day by day. And this is what the Lord did from His deep in-loveness with persons who only had potential to become pearls. He was and is in love with the idea of who we may become.

Bought it- The Greek is elsewhere translated “redeem”. This speaks of our redemption by the love and self-sacrifice of the Lord on the cross. The emphasis is perhaps on *autos*, “it”. He had searched for many pearls, but was thrilled with giving His all for just one single one.

13:47 *A net-* It’s so easy to have a negative spirit. Are people sincere? Do they just get baptized in the hope of material help? Can we cope with so many converts? Won’t many of them leave? What does this person really believe about doctrine? Can you believe them? Isn’t this or that the thin end of the wedge? This isn’t the spirit of the Lord’s parable about the drag net fishermen (note, not fishing with a line for a special, prize catch- but concentrating on saving as many as possible, of whatever quality, Mt. 13:47). In drag net fishing, one big fishing boat drags a net which is tied to a small dinghy. God’s fishing is thus dependent on us, the smaller boat, working with Him. Thus the harvest was plentiful during the Lord’s ministry, but relatively few were converted due to the dearth of labourers (Mt. 9:37 implies). 1 Cor. 12:21 gives something more than a random example: the head (the Lord Jesus) cannot do without the feet (a symbol of the preacher in Rom. 10:15). In the work of witness especially, the Head is reliant on the preacher for the work He wills to be done.

Gathered- We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). We are as fish *gathered* into the net, and yet also *gathered* into vessels at the judgment (Mt. 13:47,48). The gathering is both then and now; our gathering into the net, our first response to the Gospel, is a gathering unto judgment. The Hebrew idea of 'calling' very often implies a calling to give account- e.g. God calling Adam to account (Gen. 3:9), Pharaoh calling Abram to account (Gen. 12:18), and Abimelech likewise (Gen. 20:9- other examples in Gen. 26:9,10; Dt. 25:8). Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively also a calling to give account. The point is, we must act now as men and women will do so on their way to judgment and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. When we go to judgment, we are not to look back as did Lot's wife; and yet we are not to look back having put our hand to the plough in this life. By starting on the way of Christ, we are starting on our way to judgment. See on 13:48.

Of every kind- Does *genos* here suggest that every genetic type of human being will have been called to the Gospel by the time the fishing is done? The word can of course refer to a nation or kindred. The suggestion is perhaps that once persons of every nation / kindred have been gathered into the net, then the night of fishing is over and the judgment (and therefore the Lord’s return) can happen. Hence our extension of the Gospel net to every *genos* will affect the coming of the Lord. Mt. 24:14 is actually explicit about this; indeed, it is a repeated teaching of the Lord (although only implicit at times) that He will come only once we have extended the net of the Gospel to every nation.

13:48 *When it was full-* Again we see the teaching that the drawing of the net to shore, the beginning of judgment, the return of Christ- is only once we have achieved certain objectives in

preaching. Every *genos*, every nation or kindred, must have its representatives in the net. It must be “full” in the sense that there is a specific number of persons who must be saved. Paul specifically states this and uses the same word translated “full” in Rom. 11:25: “Until the fullness [full number] of the Gentiles be come in”. “Until the times {s.w. “opportunity”} of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:24) probably has the same reference- for the same word is used for “fulfilled” as for “full”. The opportunity of the Gentiles to be saved will come to fullness. And then shall the end come.

To shore- It cannot be incident that the only other usage of the word for “shore” in the synoptics is earlier in this chapter, in 13:1. The crowds stood on the shore, whilst the Lord taught them. In one sense, judgment is yet to come; in another, as we hear His word, we are judged. They on the shore were as it were at judgment day. See on :47 *gathered*.

Sat down- Perhaps alluding to how a judgment session ‘sits’. But it cannot be accidental that the same word is used of how the Lord was “sitting” as He taught the people (the word is used twice- Mt. 13:1,2). As the people were on the shore, it was as if they were before Him in judgment; He sat there as if He were sitting in judgment before them. See on :47 *gathered*.

Gathered- See on :47 *gathered*.

Cast the bad away- An allusion to Jewish ideas that the Gentiles were those ‘cast away’ and that they were the ‘good ones’. But the whole idea of the faithful coming out of the sea, with all its associations with the Gentile world, suggests that the Lord foresaw how many of the good fish would in fact be Gentiles and not Jews. The image of ‘casting away’ surely shows the Lord’s attitude to the rejected. There is no pleasure in their destruction, but rather simply getting rid of them and focusing upon the “good” category. In a Jewish context, hearers would assume that the fish who were cast away were the ritually unclean fish of Lev. 11:10-12 which could not be eaten. The Jewish leaders who made others stumble are thus declared unclean, and fit only to at best be cast back into the sea, the Gentile world.

13:49 *Sever-* This work is actually done by the Angels, but the Lord uses the same word in Mt. 25:32 for how He personally will separate the sheep from the goats. We can fairly assume that His personal judgment of us will to some extent be delegated to the Angels. If indeed we each have guardian Angels in this life, then their involvement in our judgment would be appropriate. The word is only elsewhere used in the Gospels for how the orthodox Jews would sever the true Christians from their fellowship (Lk. 6:22), and the word is likewise used in the sense of religious fellowship in Gal. 2:12, where Peter "separated himself" from table fellowship with Gentile Christians when the Jewish brethren were present. And this was how the word was used within the Judaism of the time- what we might call 'to disfellowship' in a religious sense. The sum picture of these usages is surely that we are *not* to operate any fellowship policy which pretends to sever the clean from the unclean- because this is not for us to do, and whenever it was practiced (by the Jews and by Peter)- they got it wrong. The faithful were the ones wrongly

separated from.

13:50 See on 13:42.

13:51 *Have you understood?*- The word is used repeatedly in the context concerning how the Jewish world do not understand, because they do not want to understand, whilst the Lord considers that the disciples have ears to hear and have indeed understood (Mt.

13:13,14,15,19,23). But the Lord wanted to be sure; He wanted to get the disciples to consider the question. *He* thought they understood, but He wanted *them* to know that they understand; He wanted them to share His view of them. Just as in Romans 6, Paul wants his readers to "consider" themselves as "in Christ" just as God sees them.

Yes, Lord- A little phrase we find a significant seven times on the lips of those who encountered Jesus and to whom He asked questions regarding their belief in and commitment to Him (Mt. 9:28; 15:27 Gk.; Mk. 7:28; Jn. 11:27; 21:15,16). I wonder whether it was the early equivalent of the later questioning of a baptismal candidate as to whether they believe, to which they effectively answer "Yes, Lord". In this case, the question to the candidate is ultimately asked by the Lord Himself, albeit through the medium of the baptizer: 'Do you understand and believe in Me?'

13:52- see on 9:9.

Every scribe- All of the other occurrences of the word in the Gospels refer to the Jewish scribes who spiritually lorded it over the masses of secular Jewish people. The Lord is inviting the disciples, who were largely secular men and women, to believe that if they did indeed 'understand' the things which the scribes did not- then *they* were the new scribes, the new religious leaders and interpreters of the Law, in the new Israel which the Lord was creating based around Him rather than Moses. The force of "*every scribe*" would be to assure the disciples that every single one of them was included in this new vision of leadership.

Instructed- The Greek *matheteuo* specifically means 'to disciple', and thereby the Lord is making clear the connection He sees between being a scribe (a teacher) and being a disciple (learner). We cannot simply learn of Him; the nature of the understanding we receive is such that we must share it with others by teaching. The Lord uses the same word in telling the disciples to go out and make disciples (Mt. 28:19). We are to seek to make men learners, not give them a set of theological truth which they are to grip on to in an unthinking manner. We are to lead them to the feet of Jesus and to a position wherein they accept *Him* as their teacher. Distributing New Testaments and persuading people to accept the message seems to me a classic way in which we can do this in our generation. And we wonder whether Matthew, *Matthaios*, specifically records this saying of the Lord which none of the other Gospel writers do exactly because he perceived the connection between his own name and the concept of discipleship. For the words are related.

Remember that his Jewish name was Levi (Mk. 2:14), but Matthew seems to call himself 'Matthew', as if after his conversion, his very name and public image before men was now to be that of 'disciple'. Discipleship was a major concept for him.

In the Kingdom- Instruction in the things of the Kingdom in the context of Matthew 13 surely means to be instructed through correctly understanding the parables of the Kingdom which the chapter is full of. Because the disciples understood them, they were thereby instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We note that the things of the Kingdom which were explained by the parables were not simply details of the future Kingdom of God to be established on earth. They taught about the Lord Jesus and His ways amongst men- right now. It's quite possible that "the things of the Kingdom" and "the [things of the] name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12) are not two separate groups of theological teachings but rather are the two phrases put in parallel as referring to the same things. For the Lord Jesus was and is the essence of His Kingdom and the living exemplification of God's dominion / king-dom over men.

Like a man, a householder- The "householder", the head of the household, is a term used repeatedly by the Lord with reference to Himself personally; He considered the disciples to be the members of the new household over which He was head. Only a few verses earlier He has likened Himself to such a "householder", using the same word (Mt. 13:27; also in Mt. 10:25; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25; 14:21). Without any doubt, the Lord used this term about Himself. So He is saying that if they understood the essence of the parables of the Kingdom, they were not only as scribes, teachers, but like unto the head of the house Himself- the Lord Jesus personally. This is the specific teaching of Mt. 10:25: "It is enough for the disciple that he be[come] as his master". The Lord's teaching of others was not an end in itself; to know the mind of Christ and thus become as the teacher is a real possibility. The height of the calling and possibility is breath-taking. Correct 'understanding' of the Lord's teaching could not be given a higher importance and end result; although as I have tried to explain, 'understanding' is not the same as grasping academic theory. By its nature, it involves action. "A man, a householder" perhaps emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus in order to demonstrate that rising up to His status is not at all out of the question for us who are human.

Who brings forth...- This was what the Lord was doing there and then in His teaching, bringing forth things of the new covenant and the old. And He is saying that if they are instructed in the things of the Kingdom, then they can do the same. The idea of bringing forth things out of a treasure must surely be connected with the Lord's usage of the very same words earlier that same day (13:1) in His teaching that "a good man out of the good *treasure* of his heart *brings forth* good things" (Mt. 12:35). The heart is also called the "treasure" in Mt. 6:21. In the context of 12:35, the Lord is referring to Himself as the "good man", who was doing good things- despite being accused of doing 'evil things' by the Jewish leaders. The ultimate 'treasure' of the Lord at this time was His heart, His mind. And thus the invitation to be "like" the Lord becomes even

more intimate and meaningful. We are being invited here to have the mind of Christ. He has already explained that the learner [disciple] is to be the scribe [the teacher]. If we have the mind of Christ, then just as He brought forth things new and old from the treasure of that mind / heart, then we shall do likewise. Yet we note that the householder, the Lord Jesus, brings forth these things out of *His* treasure. And He has just spoken of how He finds His treasure- us- in the field of the world (Mt. 13:44 s.w.). The idea is that if the disciples understood, then He would bring forth out of *them* "things new and old" with which to impress the watching world. Again- the learners [disciples] were to be used by Him as scribes [teachers]. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3 s.w.), but He reveals these things to the world through His followers.

Every one who is taught the Gospel will naturally *bring forth out of his treasure* (his innermost heart- Lk. 6:45) things new and old- his new knowledge, plus his old things of the old covenant (Mt. 13:52 cp. Song 7:13). The Lord said that a scribe (one who knows well the Old Testament scriptures) who also knows the Gospel of the Kingdom is like a man who brings out of "his treasure" things new and old (Mt. 13:52). But Jesus had just defined the "treasure" as the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44). If we make that 'treasure' *our* personal treasure, the most valuable thing in our whole being, then out of the basic Gospel that is in our hearts we will bring forth things "new and old". Our treasure is where our heart is (Mt. 6:21). Yet the treasure is the basic Gospel, i.e., that Gospel lodged in our deepest hearts. The old things of basic certainties; and the new things relating to our increasing appreciation of what they really mean, these will come out of us in our lives and feeling and being.

New and old- The Lord's previous use of these terms in Mt. 9:17 was in the context of the things of the old and new covenants. Matthew's Gospel was clearly aimed at Jews, and his point in recording this was surely to assure them that not everything from the "old" way had been rejected.

13:53 This seems to serve as the end point of the longest day recorded in the Lord's ministry apart from the crucifixion (see on 13:1). The idea is that when He had finished the teaching, He departed. We meet the same idea and Greek word for "finished" in Mt. 11:1 (also Mt. 19:1; 26:1- "When He had finished [s.w.] commanding His twelve disciples, He departed". We get the impression that He was teaching according to a program; when He had finished delivering what He intended, it was time to go. And He went. This impression is given several times in His ministry. The question is whether God directly revealed this to Him, or whether He Himself on His initiative designed a program of teaching and ensured that He kept to it. My sense is the latter, which explains the way that earlier in this chapter He appears to take the decision to change from one teaching program to another.

13:54 *His own country*-The fact Jesus had a *patria* is an eloquent essay in His humanity. His physical origins were earthly; He didn't literally come down from Heaven, having been a pre-existent being there.

Their synagogue- The Mosaic feasts are described in the OT as "feasts of the Lord", but in John as "the feast of the Jews". We have the same idea here in the reference to the synagogues as *theirs*. The Jews had hijacked *God's* religion and turned it into their own, just as "the table of the Lord" has been turned effectively into 'our table' by so many who profess to be mere guests at that table. Matthew repeatedly speaks of *their* synagogue (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9), and also of the 'synagogues of the hypocrites' (Mt. 6:2,5; 23:6,34)- not the synagogues of God.

Astonished- The Gospels emphasize how people were astonished at the Lord's *doctrine / teaching* (the same word is used in Mt. 7:28; 19:25; 22:33; Lk. 2:48; 4:32) . There was something arrestingly different in the Lord's message, quite apart from the astonishing miracles He performed. We note how on hearing Paul's teaching, men were "astonished [s.w.] at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). Our preaching and teaching is the Lord Jesus as it were personally teaching others; for we are Him to this world. And the response to our teaching is therefore comparable to the response made to the Lord's. The phrase "wisdom and mighty works" in Greek seems to directly connect the wisdom [the teaching] and the miracles [the works]. Mk. 6:2 is more explicit in the connection: "What wisdom is this... that such mighty works are worked?". The miracles were therefore directly connected to His teaching. Any 'doing good' we may do in society is to be likewise underpinned by our teaching of the Gospel, and is to be a consciously connected exemplification of it. As in the Lord's ministry, there is to be a clearly visible connection between the teaching of the Gospel, and the good works.

From where- The idea may have been: 'From God, or from Satan?'. But see on :56 *whence*. They couldn't 'get it' that a man could come to such things through private study of God's word and personal relationship with God.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. I wish to labour the point- that to my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the

Messiah. He was “in favour” with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn’t distance ordinary people from Him. There was no ‘other-worldliness’ to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs. Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30, the Lord was “hidden” as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being “at home” there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his “own city” (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don’t forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn’t exactly show herself for Him.

13:55 *The carpenter’s son*- “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James? And they were offended at him” (Mk. 6:3). Mark records that they said “the carpenter” (Mk. 6:3). In full, therefore, they likely said that Jesus was “carpenter, son of a carpenter”. Such was His humanity that He appeared to have just followed the profession of His supposed ‘father’ on earth. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can’t hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

Jesus was poor. He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land". The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law,

there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: "Some peasants who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession". A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower class Palestinian piety". If this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it...He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor... the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

His mother called Mary- It has been suggested that the title "son of Mary" given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father's name. "Jesus, son of Mary" has a pejorative sense... [there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother's name". The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by. See on Mk. 3:21. It has also been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as "the son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother. According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpreted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn't allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The reference to Jesus as "son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3) rather than "son of Joseph" is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord's lack of

social identity in first century Israel; He had no father's house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 "the last deception shall be worse than the first" is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

His brothers- The Greek *a-delphos* literally means 'connected to the [same] womb'. Whilst it is true to say that the term is used for close relatives as well as blood brothers, the idea is still present of very physical natural connection. If Mary had no other children (as the Catholics claim) or the Lord Jesus personally pre-existed (as most Protestants claim) or only passed through Mary's body as a pre-existent Angel (the Watchtower's version of pre-existence), then surely another Greek word would have been used apart from *adelphos*. This whole passage speaks eloquently and deeply of the Lord's humanity and cannot be easily explained away by Trinitarians or believers in a personal pre-existence of Christ.

This makes it apparent that Mary the mother of James and Joses is clearly enough Mary the mother of Jesus- for He had brothers of those names. She had followed Him to Cana, and she faithfully followed Him to the cross. But Rev. 14:4 alludes to all this by saying that all the redeemed follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Thus Mary and the ministering women, following even to the cross, become typical of us all. Not only following the Lord in popularity, but also in the real and radical demands of His cross.

13:56 *With us-* The intention of using this particular phrase was probably to hint that the Lord's sisters were 'with' the local population in their cynicism about Jesus. *Pros* definitely can carry the idea of 'on our side', 'pro'.

Whence- As in :54 "Whence...". We note their sense that "wisdom" had to be imparted from outside a person. Their perception was that there were bodies of wisdom that could be passed on to disciples / learners. But they had never noted Jesus for studying in any particular rabbinic school, nor following any sage. He was a secular, working man- not a religious freak. Therefore they found it hard to grasp from where He had got His understanding. The idea that a man could study God's word, have a personal relationship with God and learn direct from God was very strange to them. They considered that truth and wisdom had to be passed on from man to man, not discovered personally. And that attitude is alive and well today. 'What Bible School did you finish?' becomes more important than an individual's relationship with the Lord and direct learning from Him.

13:57 *Offended-* He was a stumbling block to Israel generally, and particularly to His own neighbours. When He taught terrible judgment for those who make others stumble, He must have spoken with acute awareness that He too would make others stumble. *En autos*, "in Him", grammatically means that He was the instrumentality of their stumbling. The point is that He did not do this intentionally, and the fault for the stumbling was with the stumbler. In some things we all make some stumble, James comments (James 3:2). When He declared Himself as

Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation.). In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. If He indeed was God, a Divine comet which hit this world for 33 years and sped off again, then the depth of His humanity was nothing less than a cruel deception.

A prophet is not without honour- We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn't defined so much by 'who they were' as by 'whom they belonged to and where they originated from'. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn't get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris* ("country") and *oikos* ("family"). This is the same problem as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on :58.

His own house(hold)- We have yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity, in that He talked of His own family of origin, which included His blood brothers and sisters of the previous verses. But He has just spoken of Himself as the 'householder', the head of the family / house (see on 13:27,52). Clearly enough, He is contrasting His spiritual family with His natural family. That

group of mixed up, doubting and misunderstanding men and women who followed Him- had replaced His family of origin as His real family.

13:58 *Their unbelief*- He could not do a mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief- as if He would have done a mighty miracle greater than the few healings He did perform there, but that possibility was discounted by their lack of faith (Mk. 6:5,6). Although the Lord at times healed people who had no faith (e.g. the blind man who didn't even know who the Son of God was), yet it seems that the Lord in this context wanted to see faith before healing people. Thus we see His sensitivity in operating in a different way with different people. Sometimes He does things for people *in order that* they might come to faith; in other contexts, He will only do things for people if they first have faith. It would seem therefore that He expected faith from His family and neighbours, seeing that they knew Him. Mk. 6:6 adds the comment that the Lord was "amazed" at their unbelief- the only time we hear of Him being 'amazed'. Yet given His penetrating psychological insight into people, surely He could have guessed at the response in Nazareth? His amazement would therefore seem to be a reflection of His supreme *hopefulness* for people- a characteristic which makes the Lord so altogether lovely and such a powerful example to us.

Notes

(1) Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150.

(2) H. N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica Company, 1952) p.61.

(3) W.D. Davies, *Matthew (op cit.)* p. 422.