



MATTHEW 13

April 18th, 1775 a Son of a silver smith rode through the Massachusetts countryside yelling “The British are coming, the British are coming.” This was Paul Revere making his famous American ride to warn his fellow patriots. The real story is far better. He was a spy, a dentist, an army officer, and a rebel. Darth Vader would not have liked this guy working for the rebel forces. I was caught up in the moment reading about this period of time. Did you know that Paul Revere did not say “the British are coming”? It’s been reported that he had to be stealth in a secret call to Alarm. Some of the people considered themselves friends of the British so he had to be careful. Revere most likely said the Regulars are coming. It was a secret code for the British. This was very cool stuff. Paul Revere is famous for being a proclaimer, or a herald of a very important message.

The Calgary Herald is a newspaper. They proclaim the words of the news. Words can be important and an appointed herald like Paul Revere or a newspaper is needed to get the message out. In the 1700’s it was meant to spread a word in public or in secret during a war.

In the bible these heralds came in two forms. One was the prophet: a man or woman who brought forth Gods word. In Isaiah we hear “thus says the Lord.” The second is angels. Sometimes God would appoint these angels to speak for him. Angels appeared before the Shepard’s in a field saying in Luke 2:10 **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”** This inspired the title of the famous song “hark the herald angels sing” glory to the new born king.

Sometimes the herald doesn’t work so well. On Dec 7 1945 many different people spotted what looked like planes on the horizon in Hawaii. They sent out the word in a warning. The military decided the words were false and that it probably was a large flock of birds. There is a gunner station on the top of Diamond Head volcano, yet that morning it was unmanned. A herald wasn’t there to see hundreds of Japanese planes coming in on Pearl Harbor. No proclamation, no report, and no herald of an important word ringing out “the Japanese are coming.” Many people died because the important words were never heard.

Sometimes heralds help us and sometimes they warn us. Did you know that Jesus was considered a prophet, a herald? He spoke about such things as life, the future, and morals. In all reality he was a herald for God: speaking Gods words from heaven.

Jesus was appointed by God the Father to tell us, warn us, and teaching us important words. Many of these words are written in our Bibles. Jesus had a way of telling us Gods words in deep ways. Sometimes he would use parables. Stories that described an idea, like “what the kingdom of heaven is like”, but at other times it was like an example about a lost coin or sheep. Sometimes Jesus uses words in what I call “being smart about it, or clever.” He would proclaim something (just to get our attention), and then explain it.

Would you please open your bibles to Matthew 13? As you find your place in this New Testament Gospel, Jesus is found teaching on a beach. Did you know that Jesus had a headquarters in the town of Capernaum: a port town on the Sea of Galilee? I was amazed that this is where Jesus called home. It was 195 km from Jerusalem. I suppose it was out of the way of the business of a big city. It might have been his resort getaway. Jesus was found here many times.

They walked a lot in those days. Imagine walking about 195 km to Jerusalem. It might give you an appreciation for the gaps in the bible. One verse says Jesus is in Jerusalem and the next says he is back home. There is defiantly a gap in time: probably weeks or months between stories. You don’t walk 200 km in one day.

This chapter is not small. There is a lot of ground covered (hmm nice pun) in these words. This is part two of the series “Energizing Church.” Todays the theme

is “The atmosphere for church Growth.” Is there a better way to attract the lost to church?

Jesus realizes that too many people are at the beach (so much for a vacation in Capernaum). He wants to speak to them but there is no room. So he decides to get in a boat and speak from the water. Jesus is making room to teach so they can learn. Right from the very beginning, this Jesus story is telling us something. Jesus changed the atmosphere to accommodate the people. Verse 1 of Matthew 13:

“That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen!

This series is all about the lost and how we as the church can do a better Job of giving out the gospel: becoming a better herald. Today it’s about giving them room to grow like Jesus did on the beach. This chapter is also asking questions about the place we call church. Are we giving out good seed; are we cultivating fertile ground to grow; and finally are we interested in creating a harvest for the angels in heaven to reap.

The beginning of Matthew 13 is what I call “a foundation statement.” It’s what Jesus really wants to talk about. He sums up this chapter in these first words. It’s like a prolog in a book. The scrolling words in Star wars at the beginning of the

movies. I feel it's like Jesus stood up in the boat and said hear ye hear ye like a herald. He began by getting their attention.

If you were going to grab people's attention how would you do it? Smallville's Clark Kent would use Red kryptonite. Whenever he was exposed to the stuff he would tell the truth, and most of the time it never went very well. Jesus on the other hand used parables instead of red kryptonite. Let's confuse the masses to get their attention. Ya that will work. Well frankly it did.

In thinking about church atmosphere it never occurred to me to confuse people. I'm sure some of my sermons are confusing, but it's not intentional. J Vernon McGee always said we should put the cookies on the bottom shelf so the kids can get them. He meant that the message should be easy and accessible for everyone. Yet Jesus begins like a herald; he begins with parables, and the people are confused.

Let's begin with a parable beginning in verse 3:

A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought

forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!" Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

I bet the disciples came to Jesus. Imagine organizing an event. Your hope is everyone will come to hear a great speaker you have hired or a great musical band. What would happen if the musicians scrambled the music? Imagine all those people pressing on Jesus to hear his words. Then he speaks to them with scrambled words. The crowds probably came the disciples and said "what was that?" so the disciples came to Jesus saying "what was that." Why must you always speak to them in Parables, you know it confuses them." This was the way Jesus gets our attention. We don't understand the word of God, but when you come to Jesus and his words are through the spirit, your understanding of the word changes.

This is a teaching chapter, but it's also an atmosphere chapter. Jesus is saying now that I have your attention. In church we cater to the saved. Our messages and music speak christenese. We use big words like sanctification, justification, baptism, and sometimes simple words like sin. To the Christians its Gods words. To the lost it is alphabet soup or scrambled eggs. We are asking them to play jeopardy. Guess what I'm saying.

I guess the real question is: who is church for.” Some say the saved and some say the lost. What is your atmosphere at church set up for? Because we have Christian hymns, Christian words, and Christian traditions, I believe church has been built for the saved. The atmosphere inside a church does not call the lost. You could say confusing the message is biblical. When we do invite the lost into church, we speak christianese, and that confuses them just like a parable.

At foothills alliance they run what is called the bridges program. It is an English teaching hour using the bible as the words. The people who come don't know English, Jesus, or the Christian faith, but they come to learn English. I was in many of the classes where the people asked me to explain the words. It was confusing for them, but they wanted to understand. Bridges was built to teach and explain. It was a lot of fun.

The first 10 verses of chapter 13 seem confusing to the crowds on the beach. Maybe it was confusing to the disciples too. Jesus spends the rest of the chapter making it all a little clearer. Jesus gives them the foundation words of seeds, sower, ground, thorns, and grain. From verse 11 on Jesus will weave these words into his point. So let's take a good look at the final 47 verses, and listen to Jesus teach us in parables.

Jesus gives us a template on how to run a church on Sunday morning: how to make a great atmosphere for the people to understand God's word. We can build shelves low enough to put the cookies on for the kiddies.

The first lesson is how we are given and hear the word. It depends on what you expect at church. Can we be honest with ourselves? Do we come to church to be entertained? I realize that some people are boring speakers. We even remember who they are, why? Their words they are speaking seem boring. Is it the tone, the words, or maybe the passion? Hillsong United has had tremendous success, yet their last album Zion barely scratched the charts. I have wondered if it was the passion that was missing. Part of me is asking the question. Is it them or me? Michael W Smith did a concert in Calgary some years ago without big screens and fancy stages. I did not like it. I was not entertained. Is how the word is given important?

Jesus begins with a parable. The disciples come to him asking why do you do that. Jesus says in verse 11 **"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand."**

It's almost like Jesus is giving them a parable to explain a parable. They got it but I don't think they got it. It's like seeing the Calgary flames relationship with star forward Jerome iginla. I get it that they wanted to keep him, but I don't get why they kept him. I can see some truth but not all the truth. I think that is Jesus point. Christians see just enough to understand. The lost don't see it at all.

I have a friend who says that Justine Trudeau would make a great prime minister because he is honest about drugs in his life. My friend does not care about the values or consequences of drugs, but he values the honesty of Justine. He said that Prime Minister Stephan harper might be a moral leader but he is not honest. This friend is one of the lost. He can only see what he sees. Christians look deeper because they know Jesus and God are deeper. We have come to expect that.

The disciples expected parables, but the crowds did not. They wanted the plain truth, yet Jesus mixes his words. Jesus is a good speaker though. He uses important words that the lost understand. He uses soil, thorns, sowing, and sower. Many in the crowds were probably farmers. I was taught to know your audience before you speak. Jesus did too. He told them life stories. They may have been confused but certain words perked their attention for more. In reality they asked the disciples for more understanding.

It is important how the word is given but it is also important what they hear. Jesus goes on to give several more parables (as if one wasn't enough): over and

over again he speaks to them in christianese. I must admit this has shaken me. Why not give them the easy goods like cookies on the bottom shelf. I look at these two ways. One is that getting out the right words is important to the hearer. Use words they know. Give them stories they live themselves. If the lost don't understand that is ok, it takes time. They will come back if they hear themselves in the message.

J Vernon McGee tells a story about people who write him about his radio program. One man wrote that it was all lies, his speech was terrible, and god does not exist. The funny part is that the man kept writing and listening. JVM asked him in one letter why he continued to listen if he hated him so much. The man replied "I just want to know what you're gonna say next." In reality he was hanging on every word. A confused unbeliever was hearing Gods word and he wanted more even though he did not like it. That is nuts!! That is amazing!!! That is using the words given and relying on the ear gate to hear them; relying on the Holy Spirit to intervene in that man's life.

One more thought on giving and hearing. God's heralds always speak truth. Jesus goes on to say he has fulfilled scripture by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 6 verse 9 and ten. It says **"And he said, "Go and say to this people: "Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.'"**

10 Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."

The last part of those verses is the key to why Jesus speaks the way he does. **"So that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."** Jesus gives them the hook with his words and lifestyle stories. They somehow keep on listening. Jesus speaks the way he does because he has hope. Hope that the hearers will continue the process of opening their ears and eyes to God and the gospel message.

Know the world around you. The atmosphere at church should look like God, people expect and respect that. When we change it for them, they hate it. They are coming to God's house not their house. Again, know the world around you. Speak the truth in their words with Christian understanding. Be smart about it, Jesus was. Use real life stories that reflect the world not the church. Draw them in with the truth in the world according to God. The atmosphere respects their lives and respects God at the same time.

The second message this chapter gives is the good and bad soil. My question is "should we be careful of where we through the seed?" again Jesus goes against the grain (no pun intended). I would have thought that Jesus of all people would have told us to be wise and careful with the seed we sow. Because it says in verse 37

"The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one." Jesus takes us (the good seed) and scatters us among the thorns. Thanks for that Jesus. Why not just gather us all together in one room? Like a church?

It would be easy to say "look for good soil." This message from Jesus says nothing about the soil except that it is rocky, hard, and soft or good for planting. In the parable we read earlier "the sower of seed" there is no mention of what type you need. Jesus implies "just throw seeds everywhere." That seems like a bad idea doesn't it? Throw good seed on rocky ground, hard ground, and oh ya throw some on soft ground. Jesus says just throw the seeds. Ok now let's read it: starting in verse

24 He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" He answered, "An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he

replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'

This is a really cool parable. Take the good seed which is who: "us" as Jesus said in verse 38 and throw them onto a field "which is the world" in that same verse. Then when "not if" the devil comes, allow him to grow weeds among the saints. This verse is not saying in your own house, but in the world. You see the problem we have in church is the weeds. We want them gone or in some churches, we water them to grow. Jesus is saying to Christians go into the field and grow with the weeds. Not like the weeds but with the weeds. I think church has weeds but it was not meant for weeds. I love verses 27 thru 29 **And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" He answered, "An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'**

This is atmosphere. Ask Christians to grow together with the lost. This is not a church thing. He mentions nothing about the house of God. He is talking directly about the field. So again what is the field? It's the world yes, but it is so much more. It is your work place, your local pub, the ball park, the store, and everything else. In the Bible God always, always, always points out that the temple of God is holy. It happened with Moses and it happened when Jesus freaked in the temple area. We are not to mix the world and the temple. That includes the house and our bodies. We are to remain different. Yet, Jesus does ask us to grow and live with them. Spread the gospel to them. For so long we have done two things. One is try and combine church and state. Just look at Egypt and tell me that's working. The other is combining church and lifestyle. Tell me that's working, people are just flocking to church aren't they.

This chapter is saying be the good seed. Be good seed because Jesus is the one casting them verse 37. Do not throw yourself. It says Jesus does that. Just be good seed: is that so hard to do. This whole chapter tells us a story. Jesus is telling them about growing the crop of believers in this world we live. But really he is saying shut up; quit asking questions, and for heaven's sake quit giving Jesus advice. Quit devising plans and models to save people. Zeph 3:17 says **"The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."**

Jesus mentions that God draws people in John 6 verse 44. Jesus mentions he is the one who sows the good seed in Matthew 13:37. Jesus mentions in Luke 10

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

To have a good atmosphere at church is not to feed the sheep. That might happen, but that is not the goal or purpose of a church. The purpose is the lost. It's all in how we give the word, how they hear the word, and what type of soil we have in the church. The soil might want to be good soil or weeds will grow. Make church atmosphere holy, respectful to God, and healthy for the lost to find themselves in Christ. Church too often is rocky and hard ground.

Again why do we do this Christian thing? Why bother with seeds and soil. It's for the harvest. Listen to Jesus again in verse 30 **“Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”**

Who are the reapers? Read beginning at verse 47 **"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind;**

when it was full, they drew end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

There is a song called don't fear the reaper. I guess that depends on who you are: the children of wrath or children of God? The harvest is all of us: the wheat and the weeds; the saints and the aints; the found and the lost. We are living on this old rock together. Hiding inside a church community is not biblical. It's not. We are commanded to go and live with the lost, the weeds, and the thorns. That sucks but that is life with Jesus. His whole ministry was lived among the poor in spirit. What did Jesus come for again: to seek and save the lost. Someone once said the saved don't need saving, the lost do. We have as a church body invested in unbiblical gobble goop. We have built a house for saved people but in a nut shell “we have unintentionally harvested ourselves from the world.

The harvest is hard work but it's not our job; sowing seed is hard work but it's not our job. Our job is to be good seed among the thorns. That's it. Jesus gives us the best example of why we are to be just seed. Listen to our last verses today.

“Jesus came to his hometown and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and

Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own country and in their own house." And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief.

Even Jesus in his own family, his own town, and even in his own country was rejected. He tells this story to prove his point. No matter if you are personal with people (like family); it doesn't mean they will accept you. Jesus home town was confused about him: isn't he the Carpenters son, Mary's son? The crowds listening to the parables were confused about the message. Yet, they kept on listening because the message was intriguing, life related, and honestly holy. Make your church a place of integrity and holiness. Go out to the world and lead a holy and integral life. Be a sower among the weeds. People will come to your house if you're real because in the end Jesus is mighty to save.