

Parables of the Heart  
*The Parable of the Homeowner*

Passages: Hebrews 10:1-7  
Matthew 13:51-52

How well do you understand the Bible? How easy is it for you to make sense of isolated passages? How confident are you when you attempt to interpret the various books and texts of the Bible?

What if I were to tell you that **there's one simple key** that can unlock the entire Bible and make it relatively simple to understand? Believe it or not, **that's what today's parable is all about!**

**Let's pray.**

Today's parable is actually the eighth parable of Matthew 13. What this means is that *I lied to you last week* when I said there were only 7 parables in Matthew 13. I did this deliberately! For the fact is, although today's text is in the form of a parable, it stands apart from the other parables in this chapter. Indeed, it shouldn't even be considered as one of them.

**There are two things that set today's parable apart:**

**First, Jesus is not the central character.**

Do you remember how, in all the other parables of this chapter, Jesus was the central character in each of them? (He was the Sower, the Farmer, the Gardener, the Woman, the Treasure Hunter and the Pearl merchant.) In today's parable, however, **the central character is a group of Jewish men known as 'Grammateus'** (translated by the NIV as "*Teachers of the Law*").

The '*Grammateus*' were a distinguished class of professionals who worked as "scribes" (or copyists) of the Torah. (That's why the KJV translates '*Grammateus*' as 'Scribe'.) To copy the Torah, these men had to closely follow a meticulous set of rules. For example:

1. Each column of writing could have no less than forty-eight, and no more than sixty lines.
2. Each word had to be said aloud while it was being written.
3. If two letters touched each other, the document became invalid and had to be buried.

4. All the letters, words, and paragraphs had to be counted. The middle paragraph, word and letter had to correspond exactly to those of the original document.
5. There had to be a review of the document within thirty days. If as many as three pages required corrections, the entire manuscript had to be destroyed (by burial) and redone.

The point is clear: Every *'Grammateus'* had to handle the sacred text of God's Word with a sense of awe and privilege, knowing that *every stroke of the pen mattered!*

Of course, copying the Torah wasn't all that these men did. Due to their deep intimacy with the text of the Law, *'Grammateus'* were also Israel's *lawyers*. It was they who drafted legal opinions on such matters as marriage and divorce, loans and mortgages, the sale of land and the determination of a person's share of an inheritance.

But, **the main duty** of the *'Grammateus'* went beyond these two things. Their main responsibility (and the main source of their income) was to teach Jewish young people about the Law. That is why the NIV translates *'Grammateus'* as "Teacher of the Law"-- these part-time *copyists* and *lawyers* were most regularly engaged as *tutors* of the Torah.

Here's one more piece of information that will help us to better understand today's parable: Although these *'Grammateus'* had, historically, a high public profile, **it's obvious that they had lost the respect of most ordinary Jews... particularly up in Galilee!** In Matthew 7, as Jesus concludes His famous Sermon on the Mount, we're told that ***"the crowds were amazed at His (Jesus') teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law"***! In other words, the people felt they were being ripped off by these "Teachers"! Although they handled God's Word on behalf of the people, they (unlike Jesus) were disconnected from its power! It was just another job...a job that they jealously guarded!

Indeed, what I really find interesting is that, out of the 18 times the *'Grammateus'* are mentioned in Matthew, there is **only one positive story** in relationship to Jesus. (In Matthew 8:19, we read how a Teacher of the Law came to Jesus and said, ***"Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."*** Now, we're not sure what happened next, but it seems fairly clear that, after Jesus told him that ***"the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head"***, he turned away in disappointment.) In all the other stories, the *'Grammateus'* were growing increasingly critical of Jesus. For example:

- In Matthew 9:3, we read-- “Some of the Teachers of the Law said to themselves, *“This man is blaspheming...”*”
- Then, in Matthew 12:38, we see the Teachers of the Law joining with the Pharisees in demanding a miraculous sign from Jesus.
- Finally, in Matthew 27:41, the Teachers of the Law join with the chief priests and elders in mocking the crucified Jesus, saying, *“He saved others but he cannot save himself.”*

It seems that they increasingly opposed Jesus **because the people were turning to Him** for clarity in the Scriptures—a clarity which they didn’t have!

Keep all this in mind as we read today’s parable. For as I said, **the most obvious thing that makes this parable different** (to the other 7) is the surprising way that **Jesus makes a Teacher of the Law** (and not Himself) **the central character of the parable!**

**But, there’s a second thing** that makes this parable different from all the rest. **Although this parable** mentions ‘**the Kingdom of Heaven**’, it breaks from the common formula found in all the others parables. All the others began with the words, *“The Kingdom of heaven is like...”*. But, in this parable, Jesus begins by asking us to imagine what would happen **if one of these “Grammateus” was instructed in the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven!** Jesus says, *“Every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the Kingdom of heaven is like...”*

How fascinating! First, **Jesus deliberately takes His antagonists and puts them at the centre of His parable.** Then, He imagines that one of them has come to fully appreciate His 7 earlier parables about the Kingdom of Heaven! In effect, Jesus is surmising; *“If only one of these Teachers of the Law **paid attention to my teaching about the kingdom of heaven and connected it to all their years of training in God’s Law, then that “Teacher of the Law” would become an incredibly powerful agent of the Gospel!** He would be **“like a home owner who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”**”*

Now, stop and think about your storage shed (or your garage, or your closet). Think about all the things you have stored in there. A good home owner knows what’s in their storeroom, right? Why do they know what’s in there? So that, whenever there’s a need for something (be it a particular tool, or a food item), the homeowner can lay their hands on it **and make good use of it!**

And this is the point of the parable! Jesus is saying, *“If only these ‘Grammateus’ (who handle the Mosaic Law every day) really understood the overarching reality of the Kingdom of Heaven as I’ve presented it through these 7 parables,*

***the light*** that would come from that knowledge **would bring illumination** to every detail of the Torah. They would be able to reach into every area of their storehouse of knowledge of God's Word and, like a Homeowners reaching into their storehouse for treasures old and new, their big-picture understanding would benefit the entire nation of Israel! Indeed, this knowledge of the Kingdom would make them **true teachers of the law**, helping people everywhere to make sense of all the intricate and complex pieces of life, **brought together as a unified whole.**"

Do you see? This *Parable of the Householder* is really a *summary parable* about all the other *parables*! Jesus is putting forth a picture of how **the knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven is**, in fact, **the key to interpreting every story, every truth, found in God's Word!** Without it, the Scriptures become emptied of their true meaning and power.

Let me illustrate this concept with reference to the situation in the Ukraine where a Malaysian Airplane was shot down on Friday. I spent a lot of time on Friday listening to the radio and watching TV reports. Most of the news was going round in circles, but no one seemed to answer the question as why anyone would want to shoot down a Malaysian Airlines plane. It was only in an interview on Lateline with an independent expert on the war in the Ukraine (someone who could elaborate on the big picture on why the Russian-backed separatists would want to bring down any transport planes that supplied Ukrainian front lines) that I could finally put the pieces together in my mind.

Similarly, it's only when we get the big-picture of the *Kingdom of God* that *all the details of the Bible begin to fall into place*. Simply defined, **the Kingdom of Heaven** is *"...the exercise of God's perfect and loving will for the world... working itself out both within us and among us, as we let Him draw our hearts to Him, to bless and correct us, and to send us out to work with Him to defeat his enemies."* Or, as Goldsworthy says, it's **"God's people in God's place under God's rule"**.

And so, what Jesus is saying here is revolutionary: "If only one of these *Grammateus* got the big picture of the *Kingdom of Heaven* into their heads, what a difference that would make, not only for Israel but for the world!"

But, of course, there was little hope that this would ever happen! As I said earlier, in the 18 places where Matthew mentions the 'Teachers of the Law', there *is only one occasion* where a Teacher of the Law came even close to following Jesus. In every other case, they were increasingly hostile to Jesus.

The point of the parable, then, **seems to be directed to Jesus' disciples**. Think again about the context in which this parable was given. As soon as Jesus finished teaching these 7 parables, He turned to His disciples and asked them; ***"Have you understood these things?"*** *"These things"*, of course, is a reference to the 7 parables. Jesus was asking them if they understood that He was the central character in all 7 parables and that (as the parables suggest) He was, indeed, initiating a new age of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

As I understand it, then, Jesus was suggesting that **His disciples were going to become the new 'Grammateus', not just for Israel but for the world!** Not only would they handle the Word of God with the same reverence and awe as did those old *Teachers of the Law*, but they would have the added understanding of the overarching thrust of the Kingdom of Heaven to lead them into its *true spiritual application* in the lives of ordinary men and women. Instead of preaching a form of pietistic legalism, or some *"pie in the sky when you die"* sort of religion, they would preach the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the presence of His Kingdom that was already expanding throughout the earth (just as the 7 Parables had so clearly described) and overthrowing the enemy, Satan!

Do you see? These disciples were being equipped to take the Word of God, in the fullness of its power and glory, *and share it with the world in a way that the Grammateus of Israel had failed to do!*

In fact, even back in chapter 10, not only is there evidence that the disciples were **starting to understand the dynamics of the Kingdom...but** they were **already beginning to see the results!** Remember, when Jesus first sent them out two by two, He told them to go and preach one (and only one) message: ***"The Kingdom of Heaven is near!"*** ??? Well, that's exactly what they did... and with amazing results! We're told in Luke's Gospel that when the disciples came back from one of their mission trips, they even exclaimed that they saw *Satan fall like lightning from heaven!* Clearly, they were blown away by the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven was so near and, because of that reality, **God's Word went forth with power and authority**, just as it was always meant to!

It makes sense, then, why (in the concluding chapter of Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28), the Risen Christ commands His disciples to take this *Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven* to all the nations: ***"Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*** Jesus was making it clear—*this big picture of God's Kingdom* (with Him as its central character) *must be clearly and methodically taught to every nation, race, tribe*

*and tongue!* Anything less will be a failure, and a corruption of the true Gospel. Without the big picture of Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven, the Word of God is robbed of its power.

Now, how does all this apply to us?

**Let me start with my own story:** I went to be a missionary in West Africa when I was 22. Since I had only come to Christ when I was 20, I was still a very young believer, with a fairly immature understanding of the Bible. Nevertheless, in my first two years, I had many opportunities to share my faith. My biggest problem, however, was **that I had no idea how to fit the various parts of the Bible together**. Sure, the Bible was a wonderful book of stories. Sure, I could make some kind of moral application from almost everything I read (...except Leviticus!) I could generally cobble together a certain number of spiritual truths. But I knew that something was missing! Most disturbing to me was the fact that **I had no idea how to respond to questions** from my Muslim friends and neighbours about the differences between Islam and Christianity. I had no real handle on the true power of the Gospel. I needed a bigger picture!

That's why I went to Moore College. And that's where, within the very first few weeks of classes, my eyes began to be opened to the beauty of the overarching story of the Bible-- **the story of the Kingdom of Heaven**-- which challenged and changed my perspective on every aspect of life! It all began with this little book by Graeme Goldsworthy entitled "Gospel and Kingdom".

But I'm not the only one whose understanding of the Gospel has been changed! **PTC Testimony—Michelle.**

Today's parable is an incredibly appropriate parable for us to end this series of sermons. After all, **how well do you understand the Bible...the whole Bible?** As messengers of the Good News, do you bring '*treasures*' out of your '*storehouse*', both new and old? That is, are you able to move freely, back and forth, between the New and Old Testaments? Do you have, in the back of your minds, the eternal story of God's Heavenly Kingdom, even as you read the Old Testament Law and Prophets? Even as you read of the horrors of war and genocide, murder, rape and incest, does the light of the Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus Christ break forth to illuminate these stories?

Unless it does, these stories will not only make no sense to you, but like Israel's 'Teachers of the Law', you will be stuck with a one-dimensional understanding of God and His Word... **and be left with nothing but powerless, moralistic legalisms.**

It is time to read all of God's Word **in the light of the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven and the eternal role of the Risen Jesus as God's King and Saviour!**

Only then will the Gospel make enough sense that we are able to apply it effectively in our homes, our workplaces, in our relationships, in the political realm, in areas of social action, and in acts of compassion. It is only when we see the big picture of the Kingdom of Heaven that we will truly be able to fulfil the Great commission and preach the ever-present and all-pervasive power of the Gospel of Christ to all nations!

**Let's pray.**