

The Parables of Jesus

"Judgment Begins with the Household of God"

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Theme: hearing, understanding, and obeying the word of the Kingdom.

Introduction

As preachers of the Kingdom as gospel, we tend to focus on explaining what Jesus - and later his apostles - meant by 'the seed' in his parable of the sower, that is, the word or message about the coming Kingdom of God on a restored earth.

Today, however, I want to focus on what Jesus meant by 'the soils': the ground on which that seed - the message of the Kingdom - is said to land.

But first, it is important to recognize that this parable stands among Jesus' most well-known and frequently preached teachings.

It appears in all three Synoptic Gospels and consistently ranks among the most beloved of Jesus' parables, often alongside the prodigal son.

It is taught through lectionaries, songs, Sunday school lessons, and countless sermons across the world. Almost every churchgoer is familiar with its imagery: seed, soil, birds, thorns, and harvest.

Yet in spite of that familiarity, one central truth of the parable is often overlooked or misunderstood: Jesus explicitly identifies the seed as 'the word of the Kingdom' (Matt. 13:19).

The soils, therefore, do not merely represent people who never hear the message. They are different - and often deficient - human responses to that word about the Kingdom.

When that meaning is obscured, distorted, or replaced with something else, the result is predictable: the fruit Jesus expects cannot fully appear. Understanding this parable, then, is not merely some academic or unimportant 'little deal.'

It is a matter of life and death.

Only when that true seed of the Kingdom is rightly explained and received can the harvest Jesus envisioned begin to emerge.

The parable is about those who have eyes to see and ears to hear (Matt. 13:9, 15) in relation to the 'seed,' that is, 'the word of the Kingdom' (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11).

This seed is God's Gospel of His coming Kingdom on a restored earth. The point is that most people who happen to hear or read the parable are not good soil for this seed. Jesus explains that the 'soils' metaphor represents different kinds of people: some do not understand the message when they first hear or read it, some understand it only partially, and others are so distracted that they fail to understand it at all.

The parable begins by showing how the word of the Kingdom is preached - as a seed that is scattered - but the people, the soils, react differently.

The Soils as Responses to the Word of the Kingdom

Jesus says some 'hear, but the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved' (Luke 8:12).

Here the seed is sown, but it is never received with understanding.

It lies exposed on the surface, and the enemy immediately removes it.

This soil does not represent churchgoers who never hear the message.

Rather, it represents those who do hear - but without comprehension.

Many churchgoers fit this category.

They attend regularly.

They hear sermons.

They sing the songs.

They possess some familiarity with the parable's language - the word, the Kingdom, and related terms.

Yet the message never penetrates.

Often this is due to poor or shallow preaching and teaching, or to a replacement and distortion of Jesus' actual message about the Kingdom.

In many pulpits the parable is reduced to 'repent and believe,' self-help moralism, or even prosperity teaching - anything but what Jesus actually said.

Like seed scattered on a sidewalk, the message never takes root.

By Sunday night it is gone - crowded out by distraction, doubt, and the pressures of ordinary life, while the enemy quietly steals what was never truly understood.

Others receive the word with joy, 'but they have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away' (Luke 8:13).

This soil receives the word with immediate joy.

There is enthusiasm, excitement, and emotion - but no depth.

Because there is no root system, the plant cannot survive hard conditions.

When pressure, suffering, or cost arrives, faith quickly collapses.

True reception of the word requires more than an initial emotional response.

It requires sound discipling, personal accountability, serious and constant reading of Scripture, and a willingness to count the cost of following Jesus.

Without these, faith remains shallow.

This is the convert who joins during a season of excitement but fades when Christianity requires diligence and sacrifice.

Like a plant growing in a thin layer of soil over rock, it appears healthy for a moment - but it has no staying power.

Then there are those who hear, but 'the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful' (Matt. 13:22).

This soil may represent the largest category among churchgoers.

The word is genuinely received, and real growth begins.

Yet the same soil is already crowded with rival growth: the worries of life, the pursuit of wealth, fear, ambition, entertainment, politics, and countless distractions.

These churchgoers sincerely love Jesus and may produce humanitarian fruit - feeding the poor, helping the neighbor, and the like.

They maintain steady church membership.

But fruit remains minimal because the plant is fighting for survival among stronger, faster-growing thorns.

The Kingdom word is not rejected - it is simply crowded out so that, once again, it cannot be fully understood.

Jesus makes clear that divided loyalties eventually suffocate genuine fruitfulness.

Judgment Begins with the Household of God

Jesus immediately follows the parable of the sower with the parable of the weeds, strengthening and reinforcing the same warning.

He explicitly identifies 'the field' as 'the world' (v. 38), where good seed and bad seed grow together until harvest.

Both are widespread.

Both are visible.

Both remain together for a time.

This is representative not only of Christians worldwide but also within local churches.

False teaching, worldly influence, and spiritual compromise often grow alongside genuine faith.

More sobering still, in many individuals wheat and weeds, good soil and bad soil, are mixed together in both church and home.

But there are those who 'hear the word, hold it fast in a good and honest heart, and bear fruit with perseverance' (Luke 8:15).

Later, Paul reminds us that faith comes from hearing a proclaimed message (Rom. 10:14-17).

Jesus adds the solemn warning: 'Take care how you hear' (Luke 8:18).

A person may be exposed to the parable a few or countless times and still never truly understand what it means.

Today the parables of Jesus are proclaimed not only from pulpits, but through radio, television, and the global internet.

The seed - the good news about the Kingdom - continues to be scattered across the whole world (Col. 1:23), falling on every type of soil.

Jesus elsewhere warns that 'the gate is narrow and the road is hard' that leads to the life of the Kingdom age to come; this is why 'few are those who find it' (Matt. 7:13-14).

He goes on to say that not everyone who says to him, when he comes back, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom (Matt. 7:21-23).

This means that most self-professing Christians, then, are represented by the first three soils.

Jesus also prophesied that 'this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come' (Matt. 24:14), because God 'desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

This extends the metaphor beyond the people within the church to, ultimately, the whole world.

It demonstrates not God's unwillingness for everyone to be exposed to the message of the Kingdom, but rather the seriousness of the human response.

In other words, everyone will eventually be 'on the hook,' as we might say.

The question is whether people will allow the seed of the Kingdom to take root and bear fruit that produces the obedience of faith.

Yet this salvation message is first preached within the churches.

Hence, 1 Peter 4:17 warns:

For the time has arrived for judgment to begin with the household of God, and if it starts with us, what will be the end for those who refuse to obey God's gospel?

Similarly, Paul writes in Romans 2:9-11:

Tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek...

The apostles here echo certain Old Testament prophets, where judgment is portrayed as purification beginning with God's people.

For example, Malachi 3:1-3 declares:

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi...

And Hosea 4:6 laments:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

The point is that ignorance is not bliss for the self-professed Christian who has eyes to see and ears to hear this parable but, for various reasons, never comes to understand the truth in order to be saved.

Those churchgoers we know are not in some neutral, safe category - they fit the first three soils, because they never truly understand, accept, and hold fast the word of the Kingdom, and therefore do not produce the fruit of real understanding and obedience.

The parable does not give us a fifth group of people who are 'basically fine because they go to church.'

Jesus describes only four soils (Matt. 13:19-23; Luke 8:12-15).

Three of them hear the word but never become fruitful, and only the fourth actually bears fruit.

So if someone never really understands, accepts, and holds fast to 'the word of the Kingdom' (Matt. 13:19), Jesus' own description places that person among the first three soils, not somewhere safely in between or outside the parable altogether.

While we may agree that the vast majority of people in the world - whether in church or not - are not hearing the Gospel of the Kingdom as we believe it should be understood, the parable of the sower itself is still widely known, even among many non-Christians.

They are nonetheless represented within the four soils - especially churchgoers now, and eventually everyone else as the Gospel spreads and is heard (Matt. 13:3-9, 19; Luke 8:11; Matt. 24:14).

So, to say that churchgoers are not yet represented in any of the soils until they are clearly taught that the seed is the word of the Kingdom overlooks the fact that the parable already includes churchgoers among the various responses, according to whatever light of Jesus' word they have understood.

As a result, the parable of the sower also works as a mirror held up to churchgoers. They might hear or read Jesus' words, yet remain ignorant, shallow, or distracted by their lives.

Jesus warns us to become the good soil - to understand, believe, and hold fast to the seed as the message about the Kingdom - so that we may gain immortality alongside other Christians and rule the nations with Jesus.

To the one who overcomes and continues in my works until the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will govern them with a rod of iron, and shatter them like clay pots, just as I have received the right to rule from my Father; and I will give him the morning star. Let everyone who has ears listen to what the spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 2:26-29)

The Mystery of the Kingdom

In Mark 4, Jesus teaches several parables about the coming Kingdom, beginning with the parable of the sower.

Mark 4:10-12 says:

As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, in order that while seeing, they may see and not perceive; and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, lest they return and be forgiven."

Most teach that the 'mystery' refers to God's long-awaited Kingdom breaking into history with the ministry of Jesus and the giving of the spirit at Pentecost.

Thus, in this view, there is a 'now, yet not now' aspect to the Kingdom - or, as it is popularly called, 'Already, Not Yet.'

On this reading, the Kingdom started small and remains hidden at present, growing invisibly and spiritually among Christians, yet inevitably heading toward its so-called consummation, that is, the visible and physical manifestation of the Kingdom and its King Jesus at his parousia.

This single truth is then said to be illustrated by Jesus in the parable of the sower and others like the mustard seed or leaven.

They are taken to explain the secret - especially to the disciples, who received private explanations - while concealing it from opponents.

Thus Isaiah's prophecy about spiritual blindness is seen as fulfilled, and only a few receive the Kingdom 'spiritually,' that is, in their hearts and in the church.

Those who reject Jesus, on this reading, hear only stories without grasping the deeper truth.

According to this view, the belief that the Kingdom would conquer the world gradually by inner transformation was foreign to Jewish thought - far from what most of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries expected - and has contributed to their continued rejection of Jesus as their promised Messiah.

But the weakness of this view is already exposed by the misleading translation of the Greek word *mystērion* as 'mystery.'

The NET Bible footnote on verse 11 says that the traditional translation is misleading to the modern English reader because it suggests a secret which people have tried to uncover but failed to understand.

The key term, secret (*mystērion*), can mean either a new revelation or a revealing interpretation of existing revelation, as in Daniel 2:17-23, 27-30.

Jesus seems to be explaining how current events develop old promises, since the New Testament consistently links the events of Jesus' ministry and message with earlier promises (Rom. 1:1-4; Heb. 1:1-2).

In Ephesians 1, Paul defines that secret - not mystery - as God's now-revealed Kingdom plan, first announced by Jesus (Mark 1:14-15; cf. Heb. 2:3).

In Galatians 3:8, Paul says this Gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham as a promise involving property, progeny, and prosperity.

This promise now extends to the inheritance of the whole world, exactly as Jesus promised in Matthew 5:5.

But this will happen only at the physical and visible parousia of Jesus, when he returns to establish the Kingdom on a renewed earth (Rev. 5:10).

At that time Jesus will begin to rule with the saints from all the ages into 'the age of the ages' (Rev. 11:15; cf. Dan. 7:18, 27).

So the secret of the Kingdom comes down to how God, through the Hebrew patriarchs, the prophets of old, Jesus, and his apostles, first defined the Kingdom of God:

Genesis 17:4-8 - God says to Abraham: 'You will be the father of a multitude of nations.' 'I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.' 'I will give to you and to your seed after you ... all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.'

Daniel 2:44 - 'The God of heaven will raise up an everlasting kingdom that will not be destroyed and a kingdom that will not be left to another people. It will break in pieces and bring about the demise of all these kingdoms. But it will stand forever.'

Psalm 2:6-8; Isaiah 9:6-7 - God will appoint His uniquely chosen Son to rule the nations.

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 102 (LXX) - these texts describe that rule on a renewed earth.

Matthew 19:27-29 - Jesus promises the apostles rule 'when the world is reborn and the Son of Man will sit on his throne of glory.'

1 Corinthians 6:1-3, 9 - Paul admonishes the church that the saints are going to govern and manage the world, and that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Added to all this was the revelation that the prophesied militant Messianic king would first come to suffer and die for sins - as a lamb led to slaughter (Isa. 53:7; Acts 8:32; cf. 1 Pet. 1:19) - and only after a long time would return to judge the wicked and establish God's Kingdom (cf. the parable of the nobleman in Luke 19).

Thus, the real political Kingdom spoken of by the prophets will only be realized at his parousia, the second coming of Jesus.

All this should make several things clear about what the secret of the Kingdom is - and is not:

The secret is not that the Kingdom has become a purely inner and invisible reality gradually taking over people through ethics and morals alone.

The secret includes the revelation that the Messianic King must first suffer and die for sins, and only after an extended period of time return to judge the wicked and establish God's political Kingdom on a renewed earth.

The seed in the parable is not the Kingdom itself, but the word, the message, or the announcement about that coming Kingdom.

This means that neither the person nor the ministry of Jesus, nor his apostles, are themselves the Kingdom.

The church is not the Kingdom either.

The church is the community of Christians who proclaim that the Kingdom is coming.

The church was never sent to build or spread the Kingdom as if God's Kingdom belonged to, or originated from, this world-system.

As Jesus himself says to Pilate in John 18:36:

If my Kingdom did belong to this world-system, my servants would be fighting, so that I would not be handed over to the Jewish leaders. But as it is, my Kingdom does not have its origin from this system.

Do not be deceived, my friends: the secret has been revealed as God's ancient Kingdom promises of a real world government under His Messiah on a renewed earth.

These truths have been clarified and expanded by Jesus and his apostles - not as a present hidden form of that Kingdom, as if it had already entered the world in advance of its King, Jesus the Messiah.

The Kingdom is Near, Not Here

Many teach that when Jesus said the Kingdom of God was 'near' or 'at hand,' he was referring to his first coming as the representative king of that Kingdom.

On this view, the Kingdom came in the ministry of Jesus, and especially in his miracles.

As the Anglican scholar R. T. France argued, the king is present, so the kingdom is near.

That view contradicts how the Bible defines the Kingdom of God - that is, the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament - as a still-future event.

The language of 'near' or 'at hand' did not refer to the presence of the king, much less to the idea that the Kingdom has been present ever since in some mysterious spiritual, non-literal way.

Whether it is said to be in your heart or in your church, the claim that believers are spreading and building the Kingdom now empties the biblical hope of its meaning.

The danger here should be obvious: this view redefines the great biblical hope of the coming Kingdom, replacing it with a reduced and ultimately incoherent 'Already, Not Yet' substitute.

Simply put, near does not mean here.

The Old Testament prophets spoke the same way Jesus did long before he ever appeared:

Joel 1:15 - 'Woe because of that day! For the Day of the Lord is near.'

Zephaniah 1:14 - 'The great Day of the Lord is near, near and rapidly approaching.'

Obadiah 15 - 'For the Day of the Lord is near, against all the nations.'

In none of these cases does near mean that the event had already arrived simply because the prophet was present to announce it.

Rather, it is standard prophetic speech for an approaching event.

Again: near, not here.

Note also how the book of Revelation uses similar language, with the phrase 'the time is near' framing the visions of the whole book (Rev. 1:3; 22:10).

Revelation 11:18 defines that time as the period for judging the dead and rewarding the righteous.

In other words, 'the time is near' refers to the whole collection of end-time events, including the parousia, the literal resurrection of the dead, judgment, and the reign of the saints.

It does not refer merely to the first coming of Jesus.

At that time, believers from all the ages will be raised in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5-6).

They will judge the world, rule the nations with Jesus, and finally inherit the Kingdom, just as Daniel envisioned: 'The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever' (Dan. 7:18; cf. 7:27).

This matters because the Kingdom Jesus preached is rooted in the Old Testament hope of the restoration of David's fallen kingdom through the Messiah, his promised seed and son.

That hope was always future.

Amos 9 says: 'In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old ... I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel ... I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted.'

Note that YHWH God will do it - not the USA, the United Nations, or any other nation of this present evil age.

Jesus himself describes cosmic signs and the visible coming of the Son of Man in power and glory: 'When you see these things happening ... recognize that the Kingdom of God is near' (Luke 21:31).

That statement alone makes it impossible to say that 'the Kingdom is near' refers to Jesus' presence in the first century.

Clearly the Kingdom is near in connection with Jesus' future parousia, not his first coming.

In Luke 19:11-27 Jesus told the parable of the nobleman because people supposed that the Kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.

Jesus says the nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return.

The point should be clear: the Kingdom did not refer to the presence of the nobleman, because he did not yet possess the kingdom.

There is a departure, a waiting period, and then the coming of the king with his kingdom to establish it on earth.

Matthew's parallel parable says, 'after a long time the master' comes back (Matt. 25:19).

The same chapter uses similar language in the parable of the ten virgins: 'The bridegroom was a long time in coming' (Matt. 25:5).

The Lord's Prayer makes the same point.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, 'May Your Kingdom come' (Matt. 6:10).

If the Kingdom had already come simply because the king was standing there, that prayer would make no sense.

The Kingdom is something believers are to await and long for.

Even after the resurrection, the apostles had not concluded that the Kingdom was near simply because Jesus was there.

They asked, 'Lord, are you at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6).

That was the right question.

Jesus did not correct their expectation of a literal future kingdom; he corrected only their knowledge of its timing: 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority' (Acts 1:7).

All of this shows that the biblical meaning of 'near' or 'at hand' did not mean, 'The king is present, so the kingdom is near.'

This was standard prophetic language for an approaching event.

The Kingdom was near in the sense that it was being proclaimed and announced.

But the Kingdom itself remains firmly future, tied to the second coming of Jesus, when he will raise dead Christians, judge the world, and begin ruling the surviving nations. Jesus was not preaching that the Kingdom was at hand simply because he was present. He was proclaiming God's Gospel, the good news of His soon-coming Kingdom.

As Jesus said both before and after his resurrection: 'I must preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also, because I was sent for this purpose' (Luke 4:43), and for forty days after his resurrection 'he spoke to them about the Kingdom of God' (Acts 1:3).

For Jesus, for the prophets before him, and for the apostles after him, the Kingdom is first and foremost future.

He comes the second time to establish the Kingdom on a renewed earth.

Again: near is not here.

Announced, not yet established.

Promised, which means not yet literally in power on this earth.

Is the Kingdom of God Past, Present, or Future?

The belief that the Kingdom of God is either entirely past or, in some sense, a present reality has dominated Christendom since the time of Augustine.

The exact number of followers is difficult to determine, but this view has been mainstream for millennia and is held by millions, perhaps close to a billion people now.

What is often misunderstood, ignored, or simply unknown is that the New Testament speaks of the Kingdom in three tenses, which is typical of biblical prophecy.

The Kingdom of God can be spoken of in the past tense.

In Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20, Jesus says the Kingdom 'has come upon you.' Here Jesus is using Kingdom language as a foreshadowing and forewarning of the coming judgment.

Paul uses similar language in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:11 when he says that the wrath of God, that is, the fulfillment of the ages, has come upon the enemies of the gospel.

By contrast, in Colossians 1:13, Paul says that God 'has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.'

The point is that Christians have been removed from this present evil age by choosing to live like Kingdom people now.

Paul alludes to this throughout the rest of the chapter in verses 9-10 and 21-22.

He also emphasizes the future Kingdom hope 'reserved for you in heaven' (v. 5), warning them not to shift from the hope of the gospel that they heard (v. 23).

So if the Kingdom has come and gone, why would Paul repeatedly describe the Kingdom as something hoped for? As he says in Romans 8:24-25, hope that is seen is not hope at all; we eagerly wait for what we do not yet see.

Both Jesus and Paul are speaking in biblical language suited to prophecy.

The Kingdom can also be spoken of in the present tense.

In Luke 17, Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees to answer when the Kingdom is coming.

Jesus replies: 'The Kingdom of God does not come with careful observation. Nor will people say, "Look, here it is!" or, "There it is!" because the Kingdom of God is among you,' or 'in your midst' (vv. 20-21).

Jesus follows this by describing the future arrival of the Kingdom when the Son of Man himself returns.

His point is that when the Kingdom finally comes, it will be universal and worldwide, not merely a localized event.

As a result, people will not need to say, 'Look here' or 'Look there,' because the Kingdom will be all around them.

In Romans 14:17 and 1 Corinthians 4:20, Paul uses the phrase 'the Kingdom of God is ...,' where the context is either the power and authority of Kingdom living or principles based on the fruit of the Spirit: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 12:28 also says that 'we are receiving an unshakable kingdom.' The present tense here does not mean the Kingdom has fully arrived.

Rather, it should be understood in the sense that it has been promised by God.

Thus the Kingdom, since the days of Jeremiah nearly a millennium before Jesus, is described as at hand or near, but not yet fully here.

Meyer's New Testament Commentary adds that Calvin and others translated this wrongly as 'let us receive the Kingdom,' as if we receive it now by our own believing or effort.

Meyer says that is incorrect because the word for kingdom has no article in the Greek.

This makes it clear that the phrase is not an exhortation, a command telling us what to do.

Rather, it gives the reason for the real command that follows.

Since we are going to receive, and already are receiving in promise and prospect, the eternal Kingdom from God, Christians should respond with gratitude, reverence, and awe.

All of these usages fit the future tense of the Kingdom, which is by far the most frequent throughout the New Testament.

In Matthew 6:10 and Luke 11:2, Jesus teaches us to pray, 'May Your kingdom come.'

In Mark 14:25, he looks ahead to the future banquet in the Kingdom.

Second Peter 1:11 speaks of inheriting, or entering into, the coming Kingdom.

Revelation 11:15 envisions the day when 'the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah' has come, 'and He will reign to the ages of the ages.'

The point is that the future coming of the Kingdom is so certain to the biblical writers that it can be described in these different ways while still pointing to the same basic reality: the Kingdom is yet to come, near but not yet here.

These Scriptures should call into question Preterist, Kingdom now, Already/Not Yet, and millennium now - that is, Amillennial - teachings that have been prominent since the days of Augustine.

The biblical evidence does not point to the Kingdom as a past event, a presently ongoing reality in the hearts of Christians, or something being advanced by any church.

At his parousia, Jesus will establish the Kingdom on a renewed earth.

At that time, his promise to the twelve apostles will be realized:

I am telling you the truth: you who have followed me, when the world is reborn and the Son of Man will sit on his throne of glory, you too will sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt. 19:28)

This will also fulfill the vision of all the prophets of old, according to God's promise concerning the son of David:

"I myself have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill." The king says, "I will announce Yahweh's decree. He said to me: 'You are my son; this very day I have become your father. Ask me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession. You will break them with an iron scepter; you will smash them like a potter's jar.'" So now, you kings, act wisely; you rulers of the

earth, accept correction. Serve Yahweh in fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he become angry and you perish in the way. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Ps. 2:6-12)

On that day, the wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf, the young lion, and the fatling will be together; and a little boy will lead them. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will do no evil nor act corruptly in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. Then, in that day, the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal flag for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious. (Isa. 11:6, 8-10)

Conclusion

The parables of Jesus do not invite casual admiration. They demand a response.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus warns that hearing alone is not enough.

The decisive issue is whether the word of the Kingdom is truly understood, received, held fast, and brought to fruitfulness through perseverance.

That is why judgment begins with the household of God.

The warning is first for those nearest to the message.

Church attendance, religious familiarity, and even temporary enthusiasm are not substitutes for understanding and obedience.

The call of Jesus is therefore urgent: become good soil.

Receive the word of the Kingdom as it was preached by the prophets, by Jesus, and by the apostles.

Do not confuse the message with the Kingdom itself, nor reduce the Kingdom to a present inner experience or an ecclesiastical program.

The Kingdom remains the promised world government of God under His Messiah, soon to be revealed at the parousia on a renewed earth.

Until then, the task of the church is not to claim that the Kingdom is here, but to proclaim that it is near.

And for those who have ears to hear, that proclamation remains a summons to repentance, faith, endurance, and hope.