

“The Parable of the Householder”  
(Matthew 13:51-52)

In Matthew 13, our Lord has been teaching His disciples how things were going to work in the kingdom of heaven. He told them that the primary means through which the kingdom would grow was through the planting of the seeds of the Gospel. He said that the kingdom, as long as it was on this side of glory, would be a mixed field of both wheat and tares. He said that the kingdom would begin small, but become very large, and that its influence would be weak at first, but become very strong. He told them what must be in a person’s heart they can ever enter that kingdom: They must love the kingdom so much and value it so highly, that they would willingly give up everything they had in order to have it. He even told them how the kingdom would end: the angels will come forth with their nets and gather together all the peoples of the earth. Then after they are judged, they will take all the wicked, all those who did not receive the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and cast them into the fiery furnace. There they will weep and grind their teeth in pain for the rest of eternity. Jesus wanted His disciples to know these things so that they would be equipped to do the work He called them to do. This would give them the encouragement they needed, so that no matter how hard things seemed to get at times, they could know the Lord was working His will and His kingdom would move forward and ultimately triumph.

But there was another reason Jesus was telling them these things. He wanted to teach them, so that they could teach others. He wanted them to have insight into these mysteries, not only for themselves, but also for the others He was sending them to, so that they too could benefit and be encouraged by the truth. These two things are what our Lord is teaching us in our passage this morning, that, ***We should never be content with the things we know now. We should always be striving to learn more, because the more we know, the more useful we will be to Him, and the more effectively we will be able to help others to serve Him.***

What is it that usually makes it difficult for us to do whatever we would like to do? I say anything that we would like to do, because if we don’t want to do something, we will never do it to start with. One of the biggest obstacles that we will ever have to face in the Christian life in doing God’s will is overcoming our lack of willingness to do His work. When your heart is set on doing something, it’s amazing how much you can get done in so little time. But when it isn’t, it’s amazing how little you can get done with no matter how much time you have. Consider how your children eat at mealtime when you put something on their plate they don’t like. It takes them forever to finish it. But notice how quickly it disappears when you put something on their plate that they like, especially when it’s dessert. When your heart is in it, everything is so much easier to do. Why do you think our Lord Jesus Christ was able to get so much done in the three and a half years of His ministry? It was because His heart was fully given to the work. Jesus did more in those few years, than most people do in a lifetime. After John surveys a good portion of Christ’s life and ministry in his Gospel, he then ends with this verse, “There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written” (21:25). Jesus could get so much done, because His heart was not holding Him back, but pushing Him forward, urging Him on. History has many other examples as well, such as that of the apostle Paul, who evangelized most of the Roman Empire, or the Wesleys, George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards, who through their

tireless efforts, were able to evangelize most of England and the American colonies during the Great Awakening in the mid-eighteenth century. They all lived relatively short lives, but were able to get a great deal done, because they didn't just stand and stare at all the obstacles in their way, they didn't let their affections get ensnared by the things of the world, but they pressed forward in their labors with all their hearts, only veering off from moving into one particular direction when the Spirit of God closed the door ahead of them and opened another. In the case of Paul, the Wesleys, Whitefield and Edwards, they set their hearts on giving glory to the God who had saved them from eternal destruction. They wanted the world to know about this God who was so full of mercy to lost sinners. And so they gave themselves completely to Him. Let me begin by saying that if we want to have this same kind of zeal and commitment, this same kind of love for the Savior that would motivate them to serve Christ no matter what, then we must be willing to do what they did. They died to themselves so that they might live for the One who died for them. If we stand on the sidelines for the rest of our lives counting the cost, wondering whether we are willing to pay it or not, we will not only accomplish nothing for God's glory, we will betray the fact that we really love the world more than we love God.

But having purposed in our hearts to overcome these obstacles, there is something else that often stands in our way, and that is the lack of knowledge. Jesus needed to teach His disciples for three and a half years, before they were ready to serve Him. There were certain things Jesus wanted them to know. This is why He asked them this question in verse 51, "Have you understood all these things?" I have been teaching you, but have you understood? As a good teacher, He realized that He could have taught them all day about the kingdom of God, but if they didn't understand what they heard, all His efforts would be fruitless. Nothing would be accomplished at all for the glory of His Father.

I think sometimes we forget that the Lord wants us to understand and learn His Word as well. Why do you think He appointed the teaching and preaching offices in His church? He wants us to grow in knowledge. He wants us to become mature in our thinking. That which often slows down the work of the church is either inadequate or incorrect teaching, or a lack of understanding and learning. When we all have different ideas of what Christ wants to be done in His church, it can put us at cross purposes to one another. It can even cause to turn against each other. Why does this happen? One of the problems is that there are so many views on so many issues in the church. Just about every prominent denomination holds a particular view that separates them from everyone else. When you add to this all the self-proclaimed teachers in the church, who were never educated for or called to the ministry, it complicates matters even more. So many people today hop from one church to another and from one popular teacher to another. They stay at one church until they decide they can't stand it any more and then move to another. But in the process, they become a composite of many different views, views which often aren't even consistent with each other. Still others become so enamored by a particular Bible teacher or by a particular group that has something good to say, that they stop comparing their teaching with the Bible and uncritically adopt everything they teach. The fact that there are so many teachers in the church teaching so many different things is one of the problems. We need to pray that the Lord will give us wisdom to see His truth, that He would help us to examine everything we are taught, to reject what is bad and to hold fast to what is good.

But there is another problem at the opposite end of the spectrum. There may be good teachers teaching in the church, well enough, but the students aren't taking their job to learn seriously. Christ exhorts us again and again to grow in His grace and knowledge, but so often we don't. We think it's too much work, too much trouble. And so when issues arise that have

the potential to divide us, we allow ourselves to be guided by our feelings, rather than our minds, as they have been taught in the Word. Instead of working towards healing in the body of Christ, we often take out the rusty knife of our faulty understanding and make the wound deeper and more serious. But it doesn't have to be this way. The Lord has blessed us with His Word and Spirit. He has given us teachers. He has provided many good books. The problem is not a lack of opportunity, it's a heart issue. So often we don't want to learn. But we must overcome this sin. We need to set our minds and hearts to learn, so that Christ might teach us what He wants us to do. We especially need to learn that greatest lesson of all: all true spiritual knowledge will unite and build up the body of Christ and not tear it apart. The greatest commandment is to love God and one another. This is what Christ said would be the hallmark of His Church. If the doctrine you hold to doesn't result in this, then it isn't God's truth. Christ wants us to love one another, to have the same care for one another, to work together as a body, and not as *self-amputated limbs*, doing the work Christ on our own, because we believe that the rest of the body is in ignorance or is so bad that we can no longer fellowship with it. Jesus asks us this morning if we really understand what we are all about as the body of Christ. Do we understand that we are one body? Do we understand that we are not the enemy, but the devil is? Do we understand that the devil uses our weakness and ignorance to undo us and our brethren? Do we realize that he most often tears us apart by our own hands? We need to learn these things, so that he might not destroy us, but that we might destroy his kingdom.

Notice that when Christ asked His disciples whether or not they understood Him, "They said to Him, 'Yes.'" We have understood all these things. This must have been an encouragement to Christ, because when He started teaching them, they didn't seem to catch on. When He taught them the parable of the Sower, He didn't ask them whether or not they understood it, He just explained it to them, assuming that they didn't. When He taught them the parable of the Wheat and Tares, they came to Him to ask Him what it meant (v. 36). But when He finally finished His lessons on the kingdom and asked them whether they understood, they weren't still shrugging their shoulders trying to figure out what these stories meant, they knew. They had learned. Jesus' examples and explanations were enough for them to catch on. May God grant that each one of us here would learn, whether we are young or old, man or woman, boy or girl. God's truth is for each one of us here this morning. He has called us together as a church and entrusted us with His Word that we might learn, so that we would know what He wants us to do, and so we might do it *together*. Jesus Christ is our great prophet who declares to us His will for our salvation in His Word. May He grant that each one of us would have it in our heart to listen to Him, so that He might truly bring us together as one body with one purpose.

But now having learned these lessons, the disciples were ready to go on to stage two, which was to teach what they had learned. And so Jesus now tells them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old" (v. 52).

The head or master of a household is the man who controls the resources of that household. He has control of the money. He has control of the food. And it is up to him to use those resources to meet the needs of His household. He is to use the money saved, as well as the money just earned. He is to use the food harvested from previous crops, as well as those freshly harvested. He has treasures old and new from which to draw upon to serve those under his care.

The disciples were now to do the same thing. Jesus calls them scribes. The scribes were that class of Pharisee whose job it was to transcribe, or make copies, of the sacred writings, so that they wouldn't be lost with time. They gave themselves so fully to this work that they

eventually became experts in the Law, and as experts, became the teachers of Israel. Ezra “was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). And the reason he was, was that he “set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel” (v. 10). This is exactly what Jesus was calling His disciples to do. They were to be the scribes of the New Covenant. They were to take the things they had learned and the things they were learning, and use that bread of knowledge to feed Christ’s sheep and His lambs. This included not only that revelation which the Lord had given them in the Old Covenant, but also the clearer truth of the New. They were to continue to store and lay up these things, so that they would be able to bring out of their treasury things old and new. These things were not for them only, but for all of God’s people, and the Lord was commissioning them, as the scribes of the New Covenant, to tend to His household, so that His people might not perish for lack of knowledge, but be like well-watered trees planted by the streams of living water.

This is what our Lord calls His ministers and elders to do in His church, as well as the heads of households. We are to learn His truth, so that we might break His bread and feed His people. We are not just to rely on what we have been taught, whether in our upbringing, if we were so blessed as to have been raised in a home with strong Christian nurture, nor in our training to be officers, whether that was in a church class or in a seminary environment, but we are continually to be learning more and more about God’s truth. We must learn to look at it from different perspectives. The Puritans examined the Scripture to find out as much as they could about God’s glory and how they could reflect that in their lives. Their main purpose in life was to be holy to the Lord, to be as sanctified as possible in this life in preparation for the next. But later Reformed Theology moved away from that stress on personal holiness, and began to focus on theological issues separate from their impact on their lives. From the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, the emphasis has shifted again to that of eschatology -- not so much whether Christ’s Second Coming would be before or after the millennium, but how the Bible from the very beginning points to the very end, to the consummation of all things, even giving us several glimpses of that final judgment in the judgments God poured out against the heathen nations. There are still things that we have yet to learn. The Bible is so broad and so deep in what it teaches, that we will never learn it all, at least in this life. There will always be new discoveries. But as we progress, we must remember not to leave behind the old things we have learned. We must not abandon the old paths, the paths of holiness, the way of mortification and vivification, of putting off the old man and putting on the new. These things are foundational to the Christian life, and if we abandon them, we do it to our own peril and the peril of Christ’s church.

May the Lord awaken us as elders to continue to store up more and more of His treasure that we may feed His people, and may He help us to be faithful stewards over the things He has entrusted to us. And for those of you who are the heads of your households, may the Lord graciously remind you that He has also charged you with the same task. You have a little flock to feed even as the elders do. You have a wife and children that you are to nurture in the Lord. This passage exhorts you as well to be continually learning and growing in your knowledge and in your commitment to Christ, so that you can adequately minister to the spiritual needs of your household. If our households, our families, were dying from some fatal sickness, and we had a medical book that could teach us how to save them, how diligently and carefully would we pour over its pages until we were able to make the antidote by which we could save them? But the Bible tells us that the members of our households are all infected with a much more serious disease, the disease of sin and corruption. It also tells us that the Lord has put a book in our

hands with the cure, and has told us that we must minister that Word to those in our care diligently if they are to be saved. But is that what we are doing? Are we studying the Bible, learning more of His truth, and teaching our families? This is what God calls us to do. Seeing that there is so much depending on our success in this work, may our gracious God strengthen us in our labors. We all need God's grace to do His will, and so let us all commit ourselves to pray for each other, that the Lord may grant us His blessing and success. And let us also prepare now to come to His table. Prayer isn't the only means by which God gives us strength. He has also given us His sacraments. Let us now look to our Lord in faith and receive the strength He has for us in this communion, that we might be faithful in the calling He has given us. Let us pray.