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Matthew 13:10–17,24–53
Stories of Mystery: Understanding the Kingdom
Chapter 1: Do You Know the Secret? (Matt. 13:10–17,31–35,44–46,51–53)

Matthew 13 concludes a section beginning in chapter 11 focused on the kingdom of heaven. Stories about John the Baptist (11:2–19), the impenitent cities (11:20–24), and the easy yoke (11:25–30) make clear the necessity of understanding who Jesus is and the critical need to make a proper response to Him. As the story proceeds, the Pharisees demonstrate that they do not understand who Jesus is. They challenge his teaching about the Sabbath and eventually decide to destroy Him (12:1–21). When the common people see Jesus' miraculous healing power and acclaim Jesus as Son of David, the Pharisees harden in their resistance even more, even to the point of blaspheming the Holy Spirit at work in Jesus (12:22–37). Demanding a sign, the Pharisees reveal they are in a condition of on-going unbelief that God inevitably must judge (12:38–45). When confronted by his own family, Jesus proclaims his true family to be deeper than blood relationships. His true family are those who follow Him as disciples (12:46–50).

Thus, the disciples responding in faith and willing to follow Jesus wherever He might lead are presented as the pattern for all who would follow Jesus. The disciples show a proper understanding of Jesus as demanding a life commitment from them in faith, which is in stark contrast to the unbelieving Pharisees. The “kingdom parables” to come in chapter 13 will provide teaching on the kingdom of heaven that will continue to build the case for who Jesus is and the crucial need for making a proper response to Him. What a stark contrast of responses to Jesus: unbelieving Pharisees out to destroy Jesus because He undermines their authority and teachings, and obedient disciples faithfully leaving all to follow Him. When we hear the parables, we should hear these issues and contrasts and be able to position our understanding of Jesus and our own response to Him.