

# Scribes of the Kingdom

*Matthew 13:51–58*

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## Introduction

Imagine two groups of people standing before a great treasure. One group stands with open hands, ready to receive. The other stands with closed fists and arms crossed — offended — and because of that posture, they are unable to receive anything at all. This is the image our passage gives us today. The group with open hands knows Jesus. The group with closed fists only knows *about* Jesus. They have information without relationship, familiarity without faith. My prayer this morning is that you would be found among those with open hands.

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## The Shape of Matthew 13

At the start of this year, we returned to our study of the Gospel of Matthew, which placed us in chapter 13 — a chapter built around seven parables of the Kingdom. The key to understanding Jesus’ parables is always to look for the central truth He is pressing upon us, the thing He most wants us to see about the reign of God.

The chapter opens with the parable of the four soils, which showed us the different conditions of the human heart as it receives the Word of the Kingdom. The next three parables — the weeds, the mustard seed, and the leaven — revealed that God’s grace is patient, empowering, and perfecting, even as they reminded us of the reality of coming judgment. The fifth and sixth parables, the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, announced the supreme worth of Jesus: nothing in this world compares to Him. And last week we read the final parable of Matthew 13, the dragnet, which pressed upon us the certainty of a coming day of judgment — and why knowing Jesus matters eternally, because for those who are in Him, that judgment has already fallen on Christ.

After seven parables, Jesus pauses and asks a question.

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” (Matthew 13:51)

I always chuckle when I read that verse. Really? You understand *all* of these? But Jesus, thank fully, does not press them on it. Instead, He shows them what that understanding actually does to a person — how genuine understanding is itself transformative. He is not testing their memory. He is testing their faith. Has what you heard taken root and begun to shape who you are?

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## The Kingdom Scribe

In the very next verse, Jesus describes what this transformation looks like in the life of someone who truly understands.

“Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”  
(Matthew 13:52)

Jesus is speaking to fishermen — men who spent their days hauling nets, mending torn lines, and selling their catch at the market. In the social and religious hierarchy of their world, fishermen were the *am ha-aretz*, the people of the land: unschooled in the details of Torah and tradition, far from the respected circles of religious learning. And yet here stands Jesus, looking at these ordinary, unlearned laborers, and describing them as scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven.

In Jesus’ day, scribes were the religious professionals — the experts in Old Testament law and the prophets, the scholars and teachers who copied Scripture and explained it to others. They occupied the highest rungs of religious education. But Jesus is not talking about *those* scribes. He is talking about something new: a scribe who has been trained *for the kingdom of heaven*. The difference is everything.

And notice what this Kingdom scribe is like: he is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. In the ancient world, the master of the house was the head of the household, the one responsible to provide for everyone who lived under his roof. Jesus is saying that this is what discipleship looks like. A disciple is not merely someone who sits and receives. A disciple becomes like a steward — someone who carries responsibility for others, someone who learns the Word so that he can nourish others with it.

Notice also the verb applied to this master of the house: he *brings out* his treasure. He does not lock it away, and he does not collect it for himself alone. The verb is active, ongoing, present tense. He is continually drawing out what is precious and giving it away. And notice what Jesus calls it — treasure. Something precious, irreplaceable, and of surpassing worth. The Greek word here is *thesauros* — and yes, that is the same word we have borrowed directly into

English as “thesaurus,” a storehouse or treasury of words. The fit is remarkably apt for what Jesus has in mind.

In the context of the Kingdom, there are many treasures, and we have spoken of some of them in the preceding parables — including the supreme treasure of knowing Jesus Himself. But with the language of *thesauros*, with the image of scribes, and with the description of this treasure as both old and new, I believe Jesus is pointing us specifically to the written Word of God. The full New Testament has not yet been written at this moment — but the treasure-storehouse Jesus is training these disciples to steward will become the very gospel we are reading today.

This means that God’s written Word — the Bible — is of immeasurable worth and value. It is a treasure.

Did you hear that when Psalm 19 was read earlier this morning?

“*More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.*” (Psalm 19:10)

We need to hear this plainly, because people treat the Bible in all kinds of ways that fall far short of treasure. Some treat it as a religious good-luck charm. Some carry it to complete their Sunday outfit. Some approach it like a crossword puzzle, interesting in an academic way but not personally demanding. Some treat it as a burden — something they know they ought to read but never quite do. And some, most troublingly of all, treat it as a club, a weapon to manipulate people into compliance.

Jesus does not call Scripture a club, a charm, a puzzle, or a burden. He calls it a treasure — something of surpassing value, worth possessing, worth protecting, worth opening generously for others. And that is precisely what a scribe of the Kingdom does. He enriches others by bringing out the treasures of both the Old and the New — the law and prophets fulfilled in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What does this look like in everyday life? A scribe trained for the Kingdom is someone who has learned to read Scripture as one unfolding story of God’s reign and rescue — a story that reaches its climax and fulfillment in Christ. It means learning to see how the Old Testament anticipates and the New Testament announces. It means grasping that the Old Testament is not a collection of disconnected stories, but one story, one plan, one King, one Kingdom.

But this is more than connecting theological dots. Jesus is describing a disciple who knows how to bring out the right treasure at the right time — with wisdom and with love — for real people in real need.

When a friend is anxious about finances, you don’t offer a shallow pep talk. You open the storehouse. *Remember what Jesus said about the birds of the air? Your Father feeds them.*

*Remember the manna in the wilderness? God provided daily bread when His people had nothing. The Lord knows what you need — and He is faithful. When a teenager is struggling with identity and worth, you don't simply say, "You're special." You bring out the treasure. Listen to Psalm 139 — God knit you together in your mother's womb. You are not an accident. And Jesus said you are worth more than many sparrows. The God who numbers the hairs of your head sees you and knows you. When someone is drowning in grief, you don't reach for clichés. You bring out something weight-bearing. Jesus wept at Lazarus' tomb. He is not distant from your pain. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted — rest in His presence.*

This is what a scribe trained for the Kingdom does. Not merely someone who believes true things, but someone who has learned how to bring those true things out — to draw from the treasury of God's Word with wisdom and love — so that real people in real need are nourished. This is what it looks like not just to know about Jesus, but to know Him.

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## **The People of Nazareth**

But now, suddenly, we meet a group of people who know a great deal about Jesus and do not know Him at all.

*And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? 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 these things?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. (Matthew 13:53–58)*

Mark that word *astonished*. The people of Nazareth are seeing the wisdom and the mighty works of Jesus with their own eyes. They are, in effect, testifying to who He is. They acknowledge His wisdom; they cannot deny His miracles. They have the evidence right in front of them. But because they were so familiar with Jesus — because they thought they already knew Him — they could not receive Him by faith.

They could name His mother. They could list His brothers and sisters. They knew His occupation, His neighborhood, His family's history. And that history, from their perspective, was not a flattering one: Mary had been pregnant before she was married. Jesus had grown up in a laborer's home. He was one of them — and in their minds, being one of them meant He

could not possibly be who He claimed to be. Their familiarity with Jesus became a barrier to faith. Because they thought they knew Him, they missed knowing Him entirely.

Here before them stood the very presence of God in Christ — His wisdom, His power, His authority, all on full display. And instead of responding in faith, they became offended.

It is striking how modern Nazareth sounds. People say similar things all the time. *I grew up in church — I've heard all this before. My grandfather was a pastor; I know how it really is. I went to VBS as a kid; I've already done the Jesus thing. My whole family is Christian, so I know what I'm walking away from. I've read a book by scholars about the historical Jesus, so I know what He was really about.* The posture is always the same: a kind of informed distance, the sense that familiarity has already answered every question faith might ask. People witness God's wisdom and work all around them — in providence, in mercy, in conviction, in answered prayer — and instead of gratitude and faith, they reduce it to coincidence, to luck, to sociology, and they miss the treasure entirely.

Verse 58 is a sobering word: *He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.* Note carefully what Matthew does not say. He does not say that Jesus *lacked* the power to work among them. Their unbelief did not shrink Christ's power; it shut their own hands. Jesus is not performing for a town that refuses to receive. The treasure was held out, and they refused it.

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## **Two Groups, One Question**

We arrive at the end of Matthew 13 with two groups side by side. On one side stand the disciples — ordinary men, fishermen and tax collectors — being remade into Kingdom scribes, learning to open Scripture, see Christ, and feed the hungry with what they find. On the other side stand the people of Nazareth: astonished, but not changed. Full of facts, but empty of faith. The very One who *is* the Treasure stands before them, and they treat Him as ordinary.

The question for us today is not *Do you know about Jesus?* Nearly everyone in that synagogue could have passed a theology quiz about Him. The question is: *Do you know Him?*

When Scripture is opened and Christ is preached, do you respond with humble faith that receives Him — or with a hardened familiarity that explains Him away? One posture opens the treasure house. The other leaves you standing at the door, offended and empty-handed.

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## Application

**First, examine your heart.** What is happening inside you when Scripture is read or when Jesus is preached? When the Word confronts you, do you submit — or do you explain it away? When Jesus presses on your life, do you bow — or do you become offended? Examine yourself honestly: are you living by faith, or merely by familiarity?

**Second, if you do not know Christ, come to Him today.** Some of you know a great deal about Jesus. You know the stories, the vocabulary, the hymns, the theology. You know what Christians are supposed to say. But you have never come to Christ as a sinner who needs mercy, as a soul who needs a Savior. If that is you, hear this: Jesus is calling you to come — with your sin, your questions, your burdens, your shame, your unbelief — and to trust Him. What makes Scripture a treasure is that it points us to the great treasure, which is Christ Himself. The One the people of Nazareth dismissed is the One heaven adores. The carpenter they shunned is the King of glory. The hometown boy they explained away is the Son of God who went to the cross for sinners. Come to Him today. Repent and believe. Ask Him to save you — and He will.

**Third, if you are in Christ, become a Kingdom scribe.** You are not saved merely to be a religious consumer. You are saved to become a steward of what God has entrusted to you — someone who brings the treasure out for others. This begins by gathering the treasure into your own heart. Be in the Word. Read it. Study it. Sit under it. Let your mind and heart marinate in it. Then guard the treasure — protect the Word from being crowded out by our culture of distraction, outrage, and endless entertainment. Let the Word dwell in you richly. And then bring it out for others. Speak it. Share it. Use it to nourish the people God has placed near you. You do not have to be an expert. You only need to live in His Word and let it shape you.

**Fourth, do not let unbelief rob you of the treasures of the Kingdom.** Unbelief dulls the ears, closes the hands, and keeps Jesus at arm's length. Don't settle for a predictable Jesus and a dull Bible. Pray as the Psalmist prays in Psalm 119:18:

| *“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”*

Let us pray that together now, as we prepare to come to the Lord's Table.

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## Responsive Prayer of Preparation

**Leader:** Jesus asked His disciples, “Have you understood all these things?”

**People:** Lord, give us understanding that leads to faith — and faith that leads to obedience.

**Leader:** Your Word is more precious than gold, sweeter than honey.

**People:** We receive Your Word as treasure — old and new — fulfilled in Christ.

**Leader:** Yet we confess how easily we become like Nazareth — astonished, but unchanged.

**People:** Have mercy on us, Lord. Open our hearts to receive Your Son.

**Leader:** Search us, O God. Expose unbelief, pride, and hidden sin.

**People:** Lead us in repentance. Teach us to trust You with open hands.

**Leader:** As we come to the Table, we remember: the judgment we deserved has fallen on Christ.

**People:** We remember His cross, we proclaim His death, and we rejoice in His mercy.

**Leader:** We come not because we are worthy, but because He is faithful.

**People:** We come with gratitude — His body given for us, His blood shed for us.

**All:** Feed us, Lord Jesus, and send us out as scribes of Your kingdom — bringing forth Your treasure to a hungry world. Amen.