**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND THEM**

**(Matthew 13:10-17)**

Back during the summer and fall of 2015, not long after I moved to Enid, I preached a handful of times here at Liberty Southern. About a year later, you called me as your pastor. I believe it was the second time I preached here that I told the following story. Some of you may remember it.

A husband and wife walked into a pet store one day and were looking around. The wife walked by a caged parrot followed closely by her husband. As the husband passed the parrot’s cage, the parrot called out, “Hey Mister.” The customer stopped; the parrot looked at him and said, “Your wife is ugly.”

The man’s eyes got big; he looked at the parrot and asked. “What did you say?”

“Your wife is ugly,” the parrot repeated.

The man turned around, stomped to the front of the store, found the manager, and complained, “That parrot back there just insulted my wife! What kind of store are you running around here?”

The manager apologized and promised to take care of it. The manager made his way to the parrot cage, pulled out the parrot by the neck, slapped him around a bit, pulled out a feather, thrust him back in the cage, and warned him, “Don’t you ever insult one of my customers again. If I hear one more complaint about you, I’ll feed you to the cat.”

Moments later, the man’s whose wife had been insulted by the parrot walked by the parrot’s cage once more. The parrot called out, “Hey mister.”

The man stopped, looked at the parrot, and asked suspiciously, “What?”

The parrot leaned back with his wings folded behind him and replied, “You know what.”

When we approach the NT, we who have been around church awhile think we know what’s what. We think we have a pretty accurate idea of what the Bible is about, what Jesus taught, and what Jesus meant.

This is particularly true when it comes to the parables of Jesus. I used to think that Jesus used parables to help His hearers understand His message, but I’ve found that’s not exactly so. Instead, Jesus routinely used parables to show His hearers that they didn’t understand as much as they thought. His parables mystified the people more than informing them.

One man wrote that Christ’s parables “make mincemeat of people’s religious expectations.” Jesus consistently takes a commonly held notion and stands it on its head. When Jesus spoke in parables, the people did not walk confidently away saying, “Aha, now I see.” No, they left Christ’s presence shrugging their shoulders and scratching their heads.

The good news is that if you are a Christian, if you’ve turned from your sin and have placed your trust in Christ, then you have something the crowds that heard Jesus didn’t have. You have the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would teach us all things.

This morning we are going to discover that there exists a division in this world, and Jesus recognized that division. He speaks of *you* and *them.* We are going to examine just who the *you* are and who the *them* are. And we are going to discover how the *you* and the *them* differ. Let’s read our text—Matthew 13:10-17.

In v. 10 the disciples refer to “them.” In v. 11 Jesus makes a distinction between “you” and “them.” In v. 13, He again speaks of “them.” In v. 14 Jesus mentions “their” case. Finally, in vv. 16-17, He uses the words “you” and “your” no less than five times.

It is clear that the *you* are the disciples, the followers of Jesus, the ones who have heard and responded to His call. The *them* are the crowds, the ones who are only curious, those who are willing to listen to what Jesus has to say, but they have made no commitment to follow and obey Him.

You might say that in this world there are insiders and outsiders in regard to the Kingdom of God. That is not to say that those on the inside are any better than those on the outside. That is not to say that those on the inside are any more important than those on the outside, but the two are most definitely different.

Look again at v. 11. The KJV uses the word *mysteries.* According to Barclay, that word “was the technical name for something which was unintelligible to the outsider but crystal clear to the man who had been initiated.” We who have entered into a relationship with Jesus are the initiated. As a result, we know things that those of this world do not know. That does not mean we are smarter or wiser or more intelligent, but Jesus makes it clear in v. 11 that we know some things that others do not. He says, “To you it has been given . . . to them it has not been given.”

When I lived on Monkey Island, Thelma Lee was my 95-year-old neighbor. She was also my landlord. Whenever she wanted to brag about something, she would pretend to put her thumbs underneath the suspenders she was not actually wearing, and she would wiggle her fingers as she talked.

You and I have no reason to boast, no room to brag, no cause to strut. We can’t hook our thumbs underneath our suspenders, wiggle our fingers, and crow about knowing things others do not.

Paul asked rhetorically in 1 Corinthians 4:7, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

Jesus said clearly that what we have was given to us. Everything you have, including your salvation and knowledge of spiritual truth was graciously given. It is not a result of your superior intellect, or your studious scholarship, or your special insight. All you did was open your arms to receive what God through Christ so graciously gave.

When a mama bird flies up to her nest to feed her baby bird, we don’t compliment the baby bird on his worm-finding skills. All he did was open his mouth to receive what was given. If there is any doubt as to who you are, let me be clear: If you have received Jesus, you are the baby bird. So, open your mouth, open your heart, open your life, and let the Spirit of Jesus fill you with good things.

Conversely, if you close your mouth, if you close your heart, if you close your life, you will not receive what God would otherwise so generously give.

Based on the passage we have read, let me outline for you what makes *you* different from *them.*

1. **YOU HAVE EYES TO APPRECIATE SPRITUAL TRUTH; THEY DON’T.**

Look at the beginning of v. 16. If you have the eyes to see the beauty and wonder and glory of God’s truth, you have blessed eyes. From our study of the Sermon on the Mount in which we looked at the Beatitudes, we know the word *blessed* means “happy,” “contented,” “fortunate.”

If you are able to focus upon, see, and grasp the beauty of God’s truth, you are most fortunate. You have truly been blessed by God.

Paul David Tripp, a counselor and an author, said:

I remember taking my youngest son to one of the national art galleries in Washington, D.C. As we made our approach, I was so excited about what we were going to see. He was decidedly unexcited. But I just knew that, once inside, he would have his mind blown and would thank me for what I had done for him that day. As it turned out, his mind wasn’t blown; it wasn’t even activated. I saw things of such stunning beauty that brought me to the edge of tears. He yawned, moaned, and complained his way through gallery after gallery. With every new gallery, I was enthralled, but each time we walked into a new art space, he begged me to leave. He was surrounded by glory but saw none of it. He stood in the middle of wonders but was bored out of his mind. His eyes worked well, but his heart was stone blind. He saw everything, but he saw nothing.

Such is the case of those who are on the outside of the Kingdom. They may be exposed to spiritual truth. They may be present when it is preached or sung or acted. They may read it. If they are on the outside, however, their heart will be cold, hard, and unreceptive. They will be like the first one Jesus mentioned in the first parable of chapter 13. Look at vv. 2-3, and vv. 18-19.

Those on the inside, however, will be like the last one of which Jesus spoke. Look at v. 8 and v. 23. When the good seed of God’s word finds good soil, that person will grow and flourish. He will be abundantly fruitful.

Do you appreciate the beauty of God’s word or is it just boring, uninteresting, lifeless? How you answer that question gives you a good indication of whether you are on the inside or the outside, whether you belong to the *you* or to the *them.*

There is a second way in which the you are different from the *them.*

1. **YOU HAVE THE EARS TO HEAR AND HEED SPIRITUAL TRUTH; THEY DON’T.**

In the latter half of v. 16, Jesus says to His disciples that they are blessed because they have ears that hear. The word that is used is the same word that shows up in Matthew 17:5 where Peter, James, and John have joined Jesus in a climb up to the top of a mountain. The passage says that when they got to the top of the mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun. His clothes became dazzling white. The Old testament figures, Moses and Elijah, joined them. The three disciples heard the other three talking. Instead of having the good sense to simply listen, Peter started talking. We read in v. 5, “He (Peter) was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him.”

That word *listen* in Matthew 17 is the same word that is used in Matthew 13 about how insiders have ears to hear. Let God train your ears to listen for Jesus. Let God interrupt you so you can hear what He has to say.

A daily devotion is commonly called a quiet time. Every day we need to set aside a time where we quit talking and we tune out all the other voices they vie for our attention, and we listen for and only to the voice of God.

That means you need to turn off the TV and the radio, quiet your cell phone, and power down your computer and I-pad, and give your attention to the Spirit of God. We do that by reading and reflecting upon the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God; so, when you read the Bible, you are giving God the opportunity to speak to you. As you read the Word of God, let God speak His word into your heart.

The late Dallas Willard wrote a book entitled, *Hearing God.* In his book, he points out that communication is all about guiding a person’s thoughts. When you communicate with someone you are guiding them to think about things they would not otherwise be thinking.

I am guiding you with my **verbal communication,** right now. I am making sounds. You have learned that certain sounds make up certain words and those certain words have certain meanings. So, as you listen to me, and as you decipher what I am saying, I am guiding what you are thinking. Right now, I am guiding some of you to think, “When is this going to be over?” You wouldn’t be thinking that if I weren’t speaking.

When I was in Russia last week, I heard people speaking the Russian language, but they weren’t able to guide my thoughts because I haven’t learned their sounds and their words. But when the interpreter spoke, she put their words into words that I do know, and by doing so, she was able to guide my thoughts.

You have learned that when ink on a page is presented in certain forms they can be viewed as letters and those letters when strung together in certain formations can be viewed as words. You are able to read those words, and those words guide your thoughts. That is **written communication.**

Then, there is **non-verbal communication,** also called body language. After this service, you may be having a conversation with someone. You look over at your wife and she is glaring at you, with arms folded, tapping her foot, and glancing at her watch, you know that means something. She is communicating with you without saying a word. You are able to read her. She is guiding your thoughts. She is saying, “Hurry up, buddy, I don’t have all day. Let’s go.”

How does God communicate with us? God is infinite. He isn’t bound by time and space. I have never audibly heard God. I have never visibly seen God. While this book has ink, letters, and words, this isn’t the only way God communicates with us. God has the ability to plant a thought in your head that didn’t come from sound waves or visual stimuli. God can put a thought in your mind and guide your thoughts in the very direction He wants your mind to go. When He does that, He is speaking to you.

In Jeremiah 33:3, God issues both an invitation and a promise. God says, “Call to Me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

If you want God to speak to you, call to Him, and then pay attention. He will guide your thoughts.

Those who are insiders hear God speaking. That is why Jesus was able to say in John 10 that He is the good shepherd and His sheep know His voice, that He calls them by name, and they follow Him.

Consider the third difference between you and them.

1. **YOU HAVE THE HEART TO UNDERSTAND SPIRITUAL TRUTH; THEY**

**DON’T.**

Look at what Jesus said of *them* in v. 13. Then, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6. He compares the crowds to what Isaiah wrote of his audience. Look at vv. 14-15.

Now, let’s deal with a controversial question. Remember, our text began with the disciples asking, “Jesus, why do you speak to them in parables?” In a sense, they are asking, “Why don’t you just be clear? Tell them exactly what You want them to know. Don’t beat around the bush.” In v. 13, Jesus answers their question. Here’s the question: Is Jesus really saying, “I’m going to conceal the truth with these clever parables. It’s going to go over their heads. That’s my goal”?

I agree with Barclay who wrote:

We may be certain of one thing—whatever else this passage means, it cannot mean that Jesus deliberately delivered His message in such a way that people would fail to understand it. Jesus did not come to hide the truth from men; He came to reveal it.

You have to listen carefully to get this. I think Jesus is speaking **descriptively** rather than **prescriptively**. When you prescribe something, you are saying, “This is how I want it to be.” But when you describe something, you are simply saying, “This is how it is going to be.” Jesus is not saying, “I don’t want them to get it.” Instead, He is just saying, “They aren’t going to get it.” But some people are. Of the four soils Jesus describes in the parable of the sower, only one brings forth fruit that remains. Some people are going to get it, and we can rejoice over those who do.

While I was in Russia, I visited a rehab center. The group I was with had lunch with 9 men who were there because of either drug addiction or alcoholism. All 9 men told their story. The first two men had been at the center for several months. They spoke of how they met the Lord and how He had changed their lives. They had moving testimonies. The next man said, “I’ve only been here a week. I don’t know what is going on. I don’t understand it.” In both the morning and the evening there is time set aside for Bible reading and devotion. He was asked, “What you hear in the evening, is it helping you at all?”

He answered, “Frankly, no. It is isn’t.” He said that he wanted to quit and go back. The center does not keep anyone there against their will. They will put the man in a car and return him if that is his choice. Our prayer is that he will stay and that God will make Himself known to this man.

The good news of the gospel is God can take a person who is on the outside and bring him to the inside. Paul wrote, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:14).

When you come to Christ you began to understand truth because He puts within you His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is your teacher, and He guides you into the truth of His word.

If the Bible is unintelligible to you, if you just don’t get it, you have to wonder, “Does the Spirit of God live in me?”

1. **YOU HAVE THE WILL TO CARRY OUT SPIRITUAL TRUTH; THEY DON’T.**

Jesus compared His audience to that of Isaiah’s. The people to whom Isaiah preached failed to get it; they failed to turn, according to v. 15. The implication is that when you understand spiritual truth, you will turn from the direction you were headed and begin to follow Christ. That is what repentance is.

The day before we went to the rehab center, we went to a mission school in Volgograd. There were about 8 or 9 young men and women who had been saved and felt God was calling them to serve Him. They are enrolled in this school. Three days a week they take classes, and three days a week they are involved in hands-on ministry. When we met with them, they each told their story of how they were saved and what God was doing in their lives.

I noticed a distinct difference between how we give our testimony and how they gave theirs. We highlight the time we believed. We talk about the life we lived, and then we tell about when we trusted Christ.

None of them talked about believing in Jesus. They all spoke of the time they repented. I like that. Jesus calls us to repent. If we haven’t repented, we haven’t been truly saved. To go from the outside to the inside, you have to repent.

A few years back before everyone had a GPS navigational ap in their smart phone, you could buy a GPS system for your car. Pastor and author John Ortberg said that he and his wife Nancy were to travel to an unfamiliar part of the country taking back roads, and so they rented a car. The guy at the rental counter asked if they wanted to rent a GPS system for the car. John replied, “No. That is going to cost something. I don’t need that. I can find where I’m going without that.”

Nancy said, “I think we should get it;” so, they did.

John said that the company who made the GPS used an English woman’s voice. He noted that they used an English accent because that sounds more intelligent, and they chose a woman’s voice, well, for the same reason. He reported:

At one point when we were driving in this car, I was quite sure the lady was wrong. She said to go left, and I didn’t go left. I went right, because I knew she was wrong. Then as an interesting response, she said, “Recalculating route. When safe to do so, execute a U-turn.” I knew she was wrong, so I unplugged her. That’s the beauty of that little box. You can unplug her.

I got lost as a goose. My wife enjoyed that immensely.

So, we plugged that lady back in, and you know what she said? [If you think I’m going to help you now, you are seriously mistaken. Find it on your own] No—she didn’t say that. She said, “Recalculating route. When safe to do so, execute a U-turn.”

Ortberg said:

As soon as you’re ready to listen, as soon as you’re ready to surrender, God will say, “Here is the way home. Execute a U-turn.” That’s repentance. “I’ll bring you home.” That is grace. That’s Jesus. He is the only one with authoritative wisdom about how to live. He is the only one who brings about the possibility of forgiveness for your sin and mine. He is the only one to give any kind of realistic hope of conquering death, of life beyond the grave.

If you belong to the *them,* I call upon you to make a U-turn. Repent, and place your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

If you belong to the company of the *you,* I want to remind you that you have a responsibility to go to the them. You are to show them God’s love, and you are to share with them the message of God’s grace. Don’t just glory in your position as an insider. With the help and love of God, go to the outsider.