

Sermons on Matthew

A Growing Kingdom

*Wheat and Tares, Mustard Seed, Leaven
Matthew 13:24-43*

With Study Questions

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Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “_The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ⁻²⁵⁻ but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ⁻²⁶⁻ But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ⁻²⁷⁻ So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘_Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ ⁻²⁸⁻ He said to them, ‘_An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘_Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ ⁻²⁹⁻ But he said, ‘_No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ⁻³⁰⁻ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “_First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but _gather the wheat into my barn.”

⁻³¹⁻ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “_The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ⁻³²⁻ which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a __tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

⁻³³⁻ __Another parable He spoke to them: “_The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three _measures of meal till __it was all leavened.”

⁻³⁴⁻ _All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, ⁻³⁵⁻ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

“_I will open My mouth in parables; _I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.”

⁻³⁶⁻ Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “_Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”

⁻³⁷⁻ He answered and said to them: “_He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ⁻³⁸⁻ __The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are __the sons of the wicked one. ⁻³⁹⁻ The enemy who sowed them is the devil, __the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁻⁴⁰⁻ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁻⁴¹⁻ The Son of Man will send out His angels, _and they

will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁻⁴²⁻ and will cast them into the furnace of fire. __ There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁻⁴³⁻ __ Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. __ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:24-43)

Introduction

Something's Wrong

When you walk through a neighborhood laden with graffiti and bars on every window, you get the impression there's something wrong; even the fact that some neighborhoods feel safer than others reveal our general awareness that all is not right. We notice this at a microcosmic level in neighborhoods, but we're also aware of it in the macrocosm of nations—simply put, we live in a fallen world where the happiest story ends in death.

God—the Promise-Keeper

Well, the happiest story *would* end in death if our Maker was not also our Redeemer. For hardly a moment had passed from the fall to the promise. God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God (what theologians call a covenant God). God made a promise to save us from the due consequences of sin which is death.

God would keep this promise by sending His own Son to pay a price we could not pay and conquer an enemy we could never conquer. Jesus, the God who became man would live a life of holiness and perfection. And as the sacrificial Lamb of God He would put on our sin like a diseased garment and clothe us in His own righteousness. This is the glory and good news of the gospel.

Instructional Tools

Surely when God makes a promise, it is as good as kept. So the faithful prior to the birth of Jesus had full assurance that their faith in the Messiah (deliverer from sins) to come was their true hope of victory over

sin and death. But prior to the birth of Jesus, God used a multitude of instructional tools to reveal the nature of what His Son would accomplish.

God would use sacrificial animals, tabernacles and temples, priests and prophets, the stars, the sand, battles, giants, donkeys, and angels. All these and more are used by God as an instructive gallery one walks through in the Old Testament Scriptures with the expressed purpose of revealing His promise of redemption. They all fall very short of the lesson they were created to convey. But this was their purpose nonetheless. And perhaps the greatest instructional tool in the Old Testament was a kingdom.

Maybe this won't affect you as it has me, but it was quite a shift in my view of the world when I came to realize that God's utilization of human actions and institutions was not incidental; it was by design. That is to say that God wasn't laboring to find an illustration for the gospel and discovered that marriage would suffice.

God designed marriage to illustrate the gospel. God designed families to reveal the family of God. God designed lambs to be sacrificed and giants to be conquered all for the expressed purpose of demonstrating His own power and glory. And the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament had, as its chief design, the instructional purpose of revealing and foreshadowing the kingdom of Christ.

The Kingdom

We all have a notion of what a kingdom looks like, or at least, ought to look like. I labor this point because our view of earthly kingdoms often informs our view of God's kingdom. An errant view of what a true kingdom looks like was clearly a problem Jesus was dealing with in His kingdom parables. A misunderstanding of the kingdom is a misunderstanding of Christianity itself.

Truly the heart of the kingdom is its sacrificial King, apart from whom there would be no true eternal kingdom at all. In the way the Sermon on the Mount reveals the true character of citizens of Christ's kingdom, these kingdom parables inform us of the infrastructure, networking, expectations, blessings and severity of the kingdom.

In short, the kingdom parables can be viewed as a general meeting with his troops and drawing the battle plans for victory on his chalkboard. There are strategy, warnings, and blessings. We all know that Jesus is the cornerstone of redemption, but how is the building to be constructed?

How does this Stone become a great mountain covering the earth with grace and mercy?

The Sower of Seeds—A Message

In the parable of the sower we saw that seeds (the message of the gospel) must be planted. Unlike worldly kingdoms using clashing swords, chariots and spears, the weapons of this warfare are

**...not __carnal but _mighty in God __for pulling down strongholds, ⁻⁵⁻ __casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.
(2 Corinthians 10:4b, 5)**

It is warfare of thought. The essential Christian weapon is a message. Lies kill and the truth sets souls free. The message is the gospel, the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Let us not have the message skewed. The gospel (good news) is not telling people to ask Jesus into their hearts. The good news is that Jesus clothes sinners in His own righteousness. He becomes sin and by grace through faith we become righteous in the eyes of God.

In the parable of the sower we learned that not all will truly receive this message. And those who consider themselves citizens of Christ's kingdom need to be warned of their own shallow hearts and thorny surroundings. They must ever walk in faith and produce fruit consistent with that faith. This is perhaps the most intimate and essential aspect of the kingdom. Without this the barracks are empty.

Three Parables

The three parables before us this morning reveal the growth of the kingdom, the affects of the kingdom and the mixed nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus will teach all this in parables, **"things kept secret from the foundation of the world."** (Matthew 13:35b) Contrary to the assertion of dispensationalists, the secret is not the existence of the church age where the kingdom exists without a king. It is rather the nature and growth of the true kingdom of God.

Mustard Seed

Jesus gives the parable of the wheat and the tares. Since this will be explained by Jesus, I will address it in that order. First, the mustard seed. The varying explanations of this parable I find vexing. It seems like a very simple parable. Like a mustard seed, the kingdom of God will start small, become big and be a source of protection, comfort and nourishment, as demonstrated by the birds coming and nesting in its branches.

This is quite consistent with the way the kingdom of portrayed in the Old Testament. Ezekiel compares it to a river that starts small then becomes an impassable deluge. In Daniel we learn that it is like a stone which becomes a mountain and covers the entire earth. In Isaiah we read,

For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and __praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:11)

The kingdom of God will have its affect upon all the nations/ families of the earth.

The Leaven

But we're not left thinking that the kingdom is merely going to get big; like some shallow military occupation. The Jews at this time were occupied by Rome and the Roman Empire had little concern regarding the heart and culture of the Israelites. The kingdom of God is not merely a presence; it permeates.

Like leaven hid in three measures of meal (enough to feed 100 people), it permeates the loaves. There is no aspect of the loaf which is not also, in some respect, leaven. Whether this refers to the individual characteristics of the citizens or the familial/ geo-political influence makes no difference; to affect one is to affect the other. If the kingdom influences every aspect of me personally (family, church member, citizen), and if the kingdom grows, it will have its affect upon many families, churches, citizens, etc.

The Wheat and Tares

Jesus has taught that the kingdom will grow and that it will permeate every aspect of man. But it is this parable which causes the disciples to ask for an explanation (verse 36). A man sows good seed in a field, he sleeps, an enemy sows tares, he leaves, then both wheat and tares appear. The servants ask if they should gather up the tares; but for the sake of the wheat he has them both grow together until the harvest, at which time the tares will be made into bundles and burned and the wheat will enter the barn.

So apparently it is not all going to be smooth sailing for the kingdom of God. The barracks won't be empty, but the man in the next bunk may be working for the enemy. What we have to recognize is that this is going to be a battle to the very end. But we also must recognize God's gracious design in allowing this battle to continue. It is always His concern for His own. Matthew Henry states:

Note, God has so ordered it, that good and bad should be mixed together in this world, that the good may be exercised, the bad left inexcusable, and a difference made between earth and heaven.¹

There will be a great and terrible day of the Lord. God's people are to content themselves that they are not, in the final analysis, the harvesters. There is a fearful justice awaiting the sons of disobedience. We are to work and pray that

...God perhaps will grant them repentance, __so that they may know the truth,⁻²⁶⁻ and *that* they may come to their senses and __escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will. (2 Timothy 2:25, 26)

And through all our trials and tragedies, Jesus extends to His own the comfort of knowing that that they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Jesus completes His explanation by stating, "He with ears, let him hear." As if to say that these self-evident truths should be readily understood by anyone with ears.

¹Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 13:24). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. What's wrong with this world (Page 3)?
2. Discuss God's promise (page 3)?
3. What are God's instructional tools (pages 3, 4)?
4. What is the essential method of warfare in God's kingdom (page 5)?
5. What do we learn of God's kingdom in the parables of the mustard seed and leaven (pages 6, 7)?

6. Discuss the implications of the parable of the wheat and tares (pages 7, 8).