

## Matthew 13:24-43 – “Tares, Mustard Seed, & Leaven Parables”

We continue looking at the various Kingdom Parables here in Matthew 13. Today we get into 3 more. Jesus taught in parables to reveal truth to those whose hearts were open to hear it, but also conceal truth to those who were hardening their hearts to the things of God. It prevented them from receiving greater condemnation and judgment.

These are Kingdom Parables because they're revealing insights into this interim period between Jesus' first coming and second coming. Many believed that when the Messiah came, then the Kingdom would obviously accompany Him. But Jesus is teaching that things are going to look very different than what was expected. And it's important for us to have a right perspective on what the future is going to look like. Because many in the church today can have a false expectation of what the end times are going to be characterized by. So let's look at these parables for some insight.

### 1. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares – 13:24-30; 36-43

**13:24-30 - *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; <sup>25</sup> but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. <sup>26</sup> But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. <sup>27</sup> 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?’ <sup>28</sup> 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?’ <sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> 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.” ’ ’***

I'm sure we can begin to gain some understanding of this parable from a simple and plain view on the surface. But again, we're not going to be left to our own wisdom to try and interpret this – Jesus is going to do it for us in vv. 36-43.

Before we look at those verses, let's look at a few things to note right here...

**Tares** may be a little uncommon to us, but these were poisonous weeds. They were known as darnel grass. They looked just like wheat as they were growing in

their early stages. It was only when the ear began to appear that the difference was discovered. At that point it was too late to rip it out of the ground lest you rip out the good wheat as well. You waited until the harvest when you could safely remove the tares without harming the wheat.

As we move down to vs. 36, we see that this parable would have significance and application for those whose hearts were open to receive from it. And that's what we see with the disciples. They approach Jesus knowing there's something to be learned from this parable, and they ask for help in understanding it. And notice, Jesus reveals this truth only to the disciples.

**13:36 - *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."***

Notice we have this scene of Jesus going back into the house. We talked about that at the beginning of this chapter when Jesus left the house and how that was a picture of Jesus moving out from the house of Israel and going to the sea. His mission and ministry focus will begin to look very different. But now we have the disciples and Jesus in the house. This would represent the remnant of believing Israel. At all times, God is sure to have a remnant of believers, and there will continue to exist a remnant of God. God has not set aside Israel forever.

**13:37-43 - *He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. <sup>39</sup> The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. <sup>40</sup> Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. <sup>41</sup> 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, <sup>42</sup> and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"***

Jesus shows us here that in this interim form of the kingdom, we're going to see true believers that are living among Satan's counterfeits. Jesus said there's going to be wolves in sheep's clothing coming into your midst. Basically, we're going to see evil taking place in the world right up to the time when we see Jesus ready to inaugurate His kingdom.

Again, a lot of people think that we're going to see the world get better and better and the church is just going to hand over this kingdom ready world to Jesus to inherit. But where in the Bible does it say that?

- Paul writes in his last letter: *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. <sup>13</sup> But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."* - **2 Timothy 3:12–13**

So, we must be careful that we're not trying to take down the evil ones ourselves, that's the Lord's job. We need to be aware and be sure that we're not being deceived by them, but the Lord will eventually remove them and judge them. Then the Kingdom will come and ***the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.***

Many in Jesus' day may have been getting a little impatient; they were longing for the kingdom. They kept asking when Jesus will restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Some may have become quite cynical of the Kingdom of God ever coming and being established when they see all that is happening. But Jesus said this is exactly what it will be like – the wheat will grow among the tares. But God will one day make it all right.

And it's to help us realize today that things are progressing right along in the program of God, no matter what we see taking place. Don't be discouraged or disillusioned when evil mounts thinking that God is not at work, He is! And His purposes are prevailing in ways you will miss if your eyes and hearts aren't open to it.

Now this parable can pose a question that many struggle with: *If there is a God, and God is good, then why is there so much evil in the world?*

- First of all, if there's no God, then how do we know there's evil? What's our reason for morality and sense of what is good? God defines that. If there's no God, then we wouldn't be questioning why there's evil in the world.
- Secondly, there's evil in the world because there's sinners in the world. Everyone has free choice to follow God or not. If there was no choice, then there's no real loving relationship. God could prevent us from sinning, and thus prevent evil, but then He would be overriding the free will of people. And that's not loving.
- Thirdly, God could just remove everyone that does evil, but then that would pretty much obliterate the planet. We all do wrong. We don't like to call it sin

(we prefer to say, *I stumbled*). But it's all the same in God's eyes. So, He allows these things to grow together and through it He saves and delivers people out of that evil world and into true and eternal life in Him.

These next two parables again are often used to try and show the positive growth of the church and how it's going to have a great influence over the world. But as we look closer at these, we see some inconsistencies with this view both Scripturally and historically.

## 2. The Parable of the Mustard Seed – 13:31-32

**13:31-32 - *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, <sup>32</sup> 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.”***

This parable has often been interpreted as showing the tremendous growth of the church as being like a mustard seed. A mustard seed is the smallest of seeds. It was so small that Jews used it proverbially to speak of a very small thing. Jesus said if you have faith like a mustard seed, you will move mountains.

But with this mustard seed we are seeing abnormal growth. A mustard seed is an herb, it grows into a shrub, it doesn't become a tree. But this mustard seed become a large tree with branches.

In likening this to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus is communicating that the kingdom of heaven is going to have some abnormal growth. It's going to start small.

- Remember, people were expecting a literal reigning king of Israel to come on the scene and have a return to Israel's glory days. But the kingdom isn't going to come in with a boom instantaneously. It's going to start small.
- It's going to be the reign and rule of Christ in the hearts of His followers who are walking in allegiance to Him. But as that truth is passed on it will begin to grow. And it did. The day of Pentecost saw 3000 souls added to their number.
- And then over the next 300 years there was great persecution against the church at the hands of Roman Emperors. Satan's strategy was to come

against the church and try to cut it down. But the harder the attacks of persecution came, Christians grew stronger and the church grew larger.

Then Satan tried a different approach.

- It was around 313 A.D. when the then Roman emperor Constantine saw the benefits of getting Christians on his side. They could help fortify their army and be good citizens in his kingdom. So Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and began to unite church and state. Many pagan festivals were adopted and applied to the Christian events to where they began to be diluted and compromised.
- You see, Satan saw a new and effective strategy. Don't cut down the tree, just start to hang out in its branches.

Many people look at this parable as being a tree that many have come and found refuge in. They say the birds speak of the Gentile nations who have become a part of God's redemptive work. Though that's true, Jesus has already deciphered who the birds represent in the first parable.

- There is what's known as the law of expositional constancy. This is a fancy way of saying that idioms and symbols in the Bible are often used in a repeated similar way.
- So, we have no reason to think that these birds all of a sudden represent something different than the wicked one (as explained in 13:19).

And we see the evidence of this today. The church has grown into an abnormal monstrosity. It has developed in many ways into a corporation, a business, and many have become completely infiltrated by the world.

- When I drive by churches and I see rainbow flags hanging outside, signs promoting drag story hour, and Bibles that are no longer held as the authority, I see how the wicked one has masterfully infiltrated the church.

This next parable backs up and strengthen the interpretation of the parable we just looked at...

### 3. The Parable of the Leaven – 13:33-35

**13:33 - *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."***

Leaven was always used as a picture of sin or evil throughout Scripture.

- **Exodus 12:15**, *"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel."*
- **Matthew 16:6**, *"Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.""*
- **1 Corinthians 5:6–7**, *"Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened."*

Many have interpreted this parable to mean that the church is gradually going to influence the world. That the good news is going to permeate throughout culture and change the world. But along with the previous two parables, a different picture is painted. What appears to be communicated is that the church will advance and be large but there will be an element of corruption that would permeate and plague it. Look throughout church history to see the truth of that. Look at what's going on today and you see that things aren't getting better.

Sadly, as much as the church was to have an influence on the world, which it has in many ways, it's been the world unfortunately that's begun to have more and more influence in the church.

- And like leaven, it doesn't take much. Just a little compromise here, a little overlooked sin there, and soon it's corrupted the whole lump.

As these two last parables reveal, the danger for the church today is not persecution by the evil one, it's infiltration from the evil one. This is why we need to stand guard.

Jude could have been writing this as much for our day as he was for his:

**Jude 3–4**, *"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. <sup>4</sup> For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."*

*It is significant that these two parables are bracketed by that of the devil's work in sowing tares among the wheat (vv. 24–30) and Christ's explanation of that parable (vv. 36–43). The structure suggests that they should be taken not as*

teaching something entirely different from the parable of the tares but as expanding on it. <sup>1</sup>

**13:34-35 - *All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, <sup>35</sup> 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.”***

These are things that people never knew would happen this way. But Jesus is letting those who are true followers of Him know these incredible mysteries and secrets of God. What a joy to follow Jesus. He’s got it all worked out. He knows what is going to happen because He knows the beginning from the end. And we can rest in, and take comfort in the fact, that He is in control and all things are not falling apart, but falling into place.

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<sup>1</sup> Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 242). Baker Books.