

Various “Kingdom” Parables, Part 1

(Matthew 13)

Introduction

We have been studying some of Jesus’ parables. We’ve learned that parables are simply stories that have a spiritual lesson. A parable is like a mystery story because each one has a hidden message.

In the two parables we have learned so far, Jesus gave us the hidden meaning.

The first parable was the one about the Sower and the Seed.

In that parable, Jesus is the “farmer” spreading the seed, or the Word of God, which lands in four different types of soils. The soils represented the ways different people react to hearing the Good News that Jesus came and died for their sins.

The second parable was the Wheat and the Tares.

In that parable we learned that in this world there are people who are true believers and some that look just like true believers, but they’re not. This parable taught us that there is going to be a day of judgment at the end of time and the true believers will be taken into heaven while the unbelievers will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Today we’re going to look at three more parables that teach us about the kingdom of heaven, but Jesus doesn’t explain these; we’re going to have to figure out the hidden meaning. So, let’s put our heads together and see if we can find the hidden message.

Opening Prayer

Jesus, You were anxious for your true followers to know more about Your ways. We, too, want to come to a deeper understanding of how You want us to live our lives so that we can spread the Good News about You to everyone we meet. Please give us new insight into Your ways this morning. Give us a supernatural ability to understand the deeper things of You, Lord. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 13:35b)

Lesson

Right after Jesus told His followers the *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares*, He told them another parable about the kingdom of heaven.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

This parable tells how as the kingdom of heaven grows here on earth. Keep in mind that when we talk of the kingdom of heaven, we’re talking about the believers that make up our churches.

Matthew 13:31-32 (see also, Luke 19:18-19)

*Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard **seed** planted in a **field**. (32) It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and **birds** come and make nests in its branches.”*

Ask: What do you think mustard seed has to do with the kingdom of heaven?

Let’s look at some of the terms Jesus uses:

Ask: What is the **seed**? (The Word of God)

Ask: Who is **the man** doing the sowing (planting)? (The farmer; God)

Ask: What is the **field**? (The hearts of people in the world.)

Ask: Who are the **birds**? (The birds represent Satan or evil.)

Remember in the parable of the *Sower and the Seed*, the birds came in and snatched away the Word of God that was sown in someone’s hard-path heart. These birds were sent by Satan. And in the parable of the *Wheat and the Tares*, we learned in verse 25 that the enemy sowed tares in the field among the wheat. These tares looked like wheat, but they weren’t. And we learned that in the same way, people who look like true believers can come into our churches while we aren’t paying attention.

Well, in this parable, we learn that birds are moving into the mustard plants.

Let’s try to figure out Jesus’ secret message in this parable.

Remember, this parable is talking about the growth of the kingdom of heaven; that is the growth of the church.

The man (the farmer or God) is sowing the seed (the Word of God) into the field (the hearts of people). The seed is taking root in people’s hearts causing the church to grow, but something goes wrong...

Mustard seed is the smallest seed a farmer plants. Because mustard seeds grow large bushes, some people believe that Jesus used this story to say that a church has small beginnings but can grow and produce great results — providing great blessings to all who come into the family of God.

But size doesn’t necessarily mean it’s healthy. A normal mustard plant is only the size of a small bush. This parable says that the mustard seed became a tree so large that birds could make nests in its branches.

That is not normal! Just because a mustard plant grows to the size of a tree, doesn’t mean that it’s better. Bigger is not necessarily better!

In the same way, if a church becomes huge in number, it is not necessarily a sign that it is healthy.

Ask: What can happen if the enemy sends “birds” into our churches while we are not paying attention that get comfortable?

Like wolves in sheep’s clothing, false teachers can come into our churches and start to lead people to believe lies about God.

Ask: If a church allows “birds” to come in and get so comfortable they *make nests in the branches*, what does that tell you about the church leadership?

This seems to say that while the church leaders were not paying attention, false teachers came in and started to feel right at home.

Ask: What do you think you and I need to do to safeguard our churches from allowing “birds” to come in and feel so at home that they nest in our branches?

We need to pray for our church leaders that they would stay true to God’s Word and to be good shepherds over the flock in their care.

The Parable of the Leaven

This parable explains what happens when we allow evil or sin to remain in our churches without doing something about it.

Matthew 13:33 (see also, Luke 13:20-21)

Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

Ask: What does leaven (or yeast) have to do with the kingdom of heaven?

Let’s explore that...

Ask: Who knows what leaven (or yeast) is?

Normally, when you bake bread, you put leaven (or yeast) into the dough. *Leaven* is a substance that you put into bread dough to make it rise. It produces a gas that makes the dough puff up.

In other Bible passages, leaven (or yeast) is used as a symbol of sin because it puffs up, just as pride puffs us up and makes us proud. Although leaven looks like a minor ingredient, it seeps into the whole loaf.

This parable explains what happens when evil or sin is allowed to exist within the church, such as gossip, backbiting, complaining, arguing, etc.

If you leave the sin in the church, it will affect the whole church family in a bad way.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

Who doesn't love a treasure hunt! In this parable Jesus tells of a man that discovers a hidden treasure.

Matthew 13:44

*“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a **field**. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.*

To figure out this hidden message, let's review the terms:

Ask: What is the **kingdom of heaven**? (The family of believers in this world—the church.)

Ask: What is the **field** in this parable? (The world, the hearts of all the people in the world.)

Ask: Who is the **man** that found the treasure? (Jesus)

Ask: What did he do? (The man discovered a hidden treasure in a field. He was filled with such joy he sold all that he had to buy the field to get the treasure.)

Ask: What treasure did Jesus find? (He looked into people's hearts and found true understanding of Who He is and why He came—true belief. True believers are precious to the Lord.)

Ask: What did Jesus have that He could sell in order to buy the field?

Jesus gave His life for the field. First, He came down out of Heaven to be born as a baby human. He temporarily gave up his position in glory to humble Himself as a man! (Philippians 2:5-7.) Then, He allowed Himself to be crucified on the cross to pay for our sins. (1 John 2:2.)

Jesus went through a torturous death on the cross to take the punishment that you and I deserve, so we can now come into Heaven to live with Him for all eternity.

This parable teaches us God loves us so much that He gave everything He had to save our souls because we are precious to Him. We are the treasure hidden in the field, the world.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for teaching us what the kingdom of heaven is like. Some of these parables are not easy to understand, but I know that You want to challenge us to put our thinking caps on and dig for the hidden treasure in these stories. Thank You for writing them all down for us to discover in our Bibles. It excites our hearts when we figure out the secret messages you have hidden in Your word. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Learning Centers

Game Center

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. What is a parable? (A true-to-life story designed to teach a spiritual lesson.)
2. Why did Jesus teach people using stories? (Everyone loves stories. Jesus told stories to teach people about the kingdom of God because it got their attention!)
3. What is the **kingdom of heaven**? (All the true believers)
4. Tell me **the Parable of the Mustard Seed** in your own words. (This parable is talking about the growth of the kingdom of heaven; that is the growth of the church. This parable explains what can happen when a church grows out of control.)

5. Who are the **birds** in this parable? (The birds are a type of Satan and represent fake believers that come into our churches and get so comfortable they *make nests in the branches*.)
6. What can happen if "birds" come into our churches and get comfortable? (They can start to lead people to believe lies about God.)
7. If a church allows "birds" to come in and get so comfortable they *make nests in the branches*, what does that tell you about the church leadership. (This seems to say that the pastors and elders are allowing false teachers to come in and teach people lies about God's kingdom.)
8. Tell me **the Parable of the Leaven** in your own words. (A woman was making bread and even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough. This parable explains what happens when evil or sin is present within the church. If you leave the sin in the church, it will affect the whole body of believers in a bad way.)
9. What is **leaven**? (It's a substance you put into bread dough to make it puff up; yeast.)
10. In the Bible, what is leaven often a type of? (It's a symbol of evil.)
11. What does leaven have to do with the kingdom of heaven? (If you let sin into the church, it will affect the whole body of believers in a bad way.)
12. Tell me **the Parable of the Hidden Treasure** in your own words. (In this parable, a man discovers a hidden treasure in a field. He is filled with joy and sells all that he has to buy the field and obtain the treasure.)
13. What treasure did Jesus find? (He looked into people's hearts and found true understanding of Who He is and why He came—true belief. True believers are precious to the Lord.)
14. What does it mean that he sold all that he had to buy the field? (Jesus gave up His position at the right hand of God and allowed Himself to be sacrificed on the cross to die for the sins of the whole world.)

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