

MATTHEW 13:24-43 WHEAT, WEEDS, MUSTARD AND YEAST

“Be a part of something bigger than yourself.”

Tribulation – apart from personal times of hardship, is linked to the exile beginning in the book of Jeremiah. This idea continued up through Jesus’ day. Even after the Jews returned from the exile in Babylon, though they were again in the Promised Land, they weren’t free. They were still under the boot/ yoke of a foreign power. Therefore they defined the kingdom and the role of the Messiah in a different way than Jesus did. We would have been in the same boat.

Now at the midpoint of Jesus’ ministry, He has to define the kingdom, and is doing so in parabolic form.

- Kingdom – not the church. Much more than that. It encompasses the church, but we must be careful not to equivocate the kingdom with the church. We do so at our own peril, especially when it comes to interpreting the “Kingdom parables.”
- The kingdom is more than a geographic location or a national identity. It is more than “Camelot.” **The kingdom involves a realm as well a reign.**
- This kingdom is not a literal piece of geography with national boundaries.
- The kingdom is much more than the church; our local body. It is much more than that.

24 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." ' ' "

- Two different sowers. The sower doesn't always carry the same identity throughout the parables. As we will see, the metaphors are to be interpreted from parable to parable. Sometimes they will have the same meaning, and sometimes the meanings will differ.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

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."

It is at this point in the parables that there is a divergence in interpretation.

- The more fundamental approach and a negative connotation. Partly because the kingdom is equivocated with the church.
- Kingdom like a mustard seed. Not the smallest seed in the world, but the smallest a first century Jew would have planted. Jesus is not giving a botanical thesis.
- Mustard tree is a bush and not normally a tree. This is an exaggeration in order to make a point. It is a part of the metaphor.
- All birds aren't bad.
- **Ezekiel 17:22-24**
- **22 Thus says the Lord God: "I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it."**
- The birds here symbolize Gentiles coming to the God of Israel.
- So we have a very small seed – a small beginning that will grow in a freakish way beyond its natural potential, so that even Gentiles will nest in the kingdom. This leads us into the next parable.

The Parable of the Leaven

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."

- We now move from farming to baking; from a man's job (in that context) to a woman's. The kingdom is not limited to men.
- "Leaven is always bad!" Not!!!!!!
- While Paul used leaven with a negative connotation in 1 Cor. 5:6,b we can't hold Jesus to Paul's use of the word.
- Jesus warned of the leaven of the Pharisees as well as that of Herod in Mark 8:15. And leaven was to be removed from the house at Passover, but there are also sacrifices in the OT where leaven is to be used. (Lev. 23:17)
- But if you're still not convinced that leaven is not always bad, I ask you to look closely at the parable.

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."

- It doesn't say that the kingdom is flour that was infected with yeast. It says the kingdom is like leaven. We can't equate the kingdom with evil or sin. Once again, the kingdom is not the church.
- There was enough dough in this parable to feed over 100 people.
- The kingdom was hidden in the dough and it grew. We have the same truth taught here as we do in the parable of the mustard seed.

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!

- Two sowers
- Two seeds – good and bad; sons of the kingdom and the sons of the enemy. In the parable of the sower, the seed was the Word. Now it is people.
- The field. In the parable of the sower, the field was the heart. Now it is the world.
- Darnell grass – looks just like wheat until harvest time. Poisonous. Bio-terrorism. Roman laws against this very thing.
- Good and evil co-existing. Only God can justly sort it out.
- It is amazing how similarly believers and non-believers can look.
- Notice the equation of the field with the world in verse 38, then look at verse 41, where the reapers will gather from "His kingdom." This is often overlooked and has been since the time of Augustine. Not seeing this point helps to lead to the more fundamentalist interpretation which equates the kingdom with the church and then leads to the negative connotation of a church with corrupt individuals within it.

Advancing the kingdom creates a unity within the church that comes from recognizing that God's purposes are much, much greater than what happens in our little corner of the world or even in our local congregation. In turn, that generates a world-transforming power that Jesus prayed for in John 17: 20 – 23.

20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they

may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

As long as we focus on our little circle of Christian activity or relationships, our in-house issues, our style of worship, race, socio-economic issues, etc., we risk making our parochial interests the priority above God's kingdom interests. Thereby quenching the power God wants to release through us! In a sense, then, we come full circle and not only violate the warnings about prematurely separating the weeds from the wheat, but we can also separate the wheat from the wheat so that no one knows what an abundant harvest can be harvested.

"Be part of something larger than yourself." The kingdom.