

Five More Kingdom Parables
Matthew 13:31—50

In Matthew 13 we see Christ turning from the unbelieving masses to focus His attention on the Little Flock or the remnant of believers, including the 12 Disciples. Previous to this He was giving Israel hundreds of signs that pointed to Him as their Messiah but they continued to turn away in unbelief. Now Jesus begins telling Israel truths of the Kingdom in parables then explains them to those who have believed.

So far Jesus has told and explained the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares. The first parable warns those who will be going through the Tribulation that only a few will actually believe as they go through the world preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. They will either reject the Gospel outright or other things will slowly displace the message they at first gladly accepted.

The second parable warns the Little Flock that many false prophets, teachers and brothers will be planted among the true believers (Matthew 7:17; 24:11, 24). They will need to be able to discern who is and who isn't a true Christ follower. This parable also tells the fate of the believers and unbelievers with the unbelievers being cut off, bundled and burned in the lake of fire.

In this Age of Grace we are warned by Paul to be aware of how Satan might work. 2 Corinthians 11:13—15 says that Satan comes appearing as an angle of light and that he sends people who appear as apostles of Christ. He warns us in 2 Timothy 4:3—4 that people will turn away from sound doctrine and flock to teachers who will tickle their ears with things they want to hear instead of staying true to the doctrine that was revealed to Paul by God. We need to guard Pauline doctrine just as carefully as Paul admonishes Timothy to do when he tells him to hold on to a pattern of sound teaching (2 Timothy 1:13).

Parable of the mustard seed (verses 31—32)

This parable is about a man who plants a mustard seed in his field and it grows into a large tree that is a haven for the birds of the air. The standard interpretation is that the seed is the gospel from which the kingdom of God will grow—from a very few to many, from a localized group of believers to a worldwide multitude. The birds are often represented as being anything from Gentiles to Demons, or the tree as a form of shelter to representing corruption within the kingdom.

Jesus told the Disciples that they needed to understand the parable of the sower to understand other parables (Mark 4:13). This is why we need to first look at how Scripture defines the elements of this parable. From Matthew 13:38 Jesus defines the field as the world. By comparing Matthew 13:4 with verse 19 we see the birds represent the evil one, Satan (Mark 4:15) or the Devil (Luke 8:12). Satan is also called the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). We also know that this mustard plant grew much larger than any other mustard plant.

The mustard plant is an herb that normally grows no more than 10 feet tall. It is unlikely that any birds would nest in such a plant. Yet in this parable the mustard plant grows way beyond its normal size to a tree that would attract birds. The mustard plant is also a pervasive species that is very difficult to obliterate once it takes hold.

Putting this all together it looks like this mustard plant represents Satan's takeover of the world system in the Tribulation. Verse 31 says the man who was planting already owned the field. This could not be Christ for He had not purchased the world yet (see below). I believe the world is under Satan's control and has been since the fall. His power in the Tribulation starts small and then grows beyond anyone's expectation. Satan's empire will encompass the whole world and it will appear to the Little Flock that there is absolutely no hope of getting through the Tribulation. This worldwide kingdom of Satan is described in Revelation 13:5—8.

Parable of the leaven (verse 33)

This parable runs parallel to the parable of the mustard seed and amplifies its meaning. A woman took leaven and hid it in three measures of flour until the whole unit of flour was leavened.

Leaven is always pictured as sin or bad doctrine in Scripture (1 Corinthians 5:4—8; Matthew 16:11). In this case Satan will come in with bad doctrine and contaminate the believing remnant. Just as the mustard seed grew into a gigantic and distorted tree so too will the leaven spread and grow until the whole lump of dough is leavened. It will appear that there is no hope against Satan.

These last two parables mesh perfectly with what Jesus taught in Matthew 12:43—45 about the clean house. Israel was a house that was cleansed by Christ as He went through Israel casting out demons. Israel was now ready and able to accept their Messiah. To their detriment they rejected Christ, allowing Satan to come in seven times stronger than before to take control over Israel. This will happen during the Tribulation as pictured in these last two parables.

Notice the parable says it is about the Kingdom of Heaven but yet relates to the Tribulation. It must be understood that the Tribulation must happen in order for the Kingdom to be set up. Jesus taught the Disciples what they needed to know before entering the Kingdom. When guests are invited to dinner it is understood that part of this time of fellowship includes cooking and cleaning in preparation of the actual event. In that sense the Tribulation is a part of the Kingdom and without it there would be no Kingdom.

These last three parables were told to the Disciples in private away from the crowds.

Parable of the treasure (verse 44)

When a man discovers a treasure in a field he hides it then sells all he has and buys that field. Some view the field as Scripture with the Gospel as the treasure. The man who discovers the treasure is the one who has found the gospel and become saved. Similarly, the treasure is seen as the kingdom of heaven. Others see the treasure as the Church.

In light of the other parables we know the field is the world (verse 38) and the man is Christ (verse 37). From Exodus 19:5 and Psalm 135:4 we can see that Israel is the treasure. Christ gave up all He had with His death on the cross. He reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19) at His death, burial and resurrection. He purchased Israel according to John 11:50—52 and Revelation 5:9. Unfortunately, Israel rejected her Messiah. As John 1:11 says: “He came unto His own and His own received Him not.” This is why He began to pull out of Israel those who would believe and form a nation out of them.

Parable of the pearl of great price (verses 45, 46)

This is similar to the last parable but with a slightly different viewpoint this parable focuses on the Little Flock of believers. With Christ as merchant, He again is depicted as selling all He had through His death, burial and resurrection, to buy this pearl of great price.

Parable of the net (verses 47—50)

This parable finishes out the trio of parables that show the Disciples that the Kingdom will be set up in spite of the appearance of failure. This one seems to focus on the future of the Gentiles. Here a net is cast into the sea and pulls out every kind of fish. They are pulled to shore and sorted with the good fish going into containers and the bad fish cast away.

The angels are casting the net into the sea, just as was done with the wheat and tares. In this case the focus seems to be on the Gentiles because they are often pictured as the sea (Daniel 7:3, 7; Revelation 13:1; 17:15). The net will be cast into the world of Gentiles and will pull the righteous and unrighteous from it. The righteous will go into the Kingdom while the unrighteous will be cast into the lake of fire.

This is depicted in the judgment of the Gentiles in Matthew 25:31—46 where they are rewarded or punished for how they treated Israel in the Tribulation. Those who were believers helped Israel through the Tribulation and were rewarded with entrance into the Kingdom while the unbelievers did not help and perhaps did everything they could to make it miserable for Israel. They were cast into the fire.

Application

Although all these parables pertain to the Millennial Kingdom, there are a number of applications that can be made for us today in this Age of Grace. From the parable of the Sower the Disciples learn that only a few will accept the Gospel being preached to them. We know this is the case today as well. Only a small remnant will actually accept the Gospel message. We are not to be discouraged but allow the Lord to work in people's hearts to convict them of truth presented to them.

As Christ warned the Disciples of Satan's influence within the Little Flock with the parable of the wheat and the tares, we too need to be aware of how Satan works within the church. He appears as an angel of light but goes about deceiving (2 Corinthians 11:14). He allows people to become comfortable in their church by resting in their baptism or good works. He gives people visions of heaven with comforting feelings of warmth and peace. He distracts people with busyness and activities that keep them from getting into Scripture. He lifts up pastors and teachers that only preach messages that bolster self-esteem or help people believe in themselves.

As the Parable of the mustard seed and leaven show, Satan's influence can spread like a cancer. His influence can start small and grow to infect an entire church. There should be no room given to allow Satan a foothold into our lives (Ephesians 4:27). We must be vigilant to put off the old nature and put on the new (Ephesians 4:22—24). We must continually walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16—25) so as not to carry out the deeds of the flesh.

Finally, the parables of the treasure, pearl and dragnet should remind us of the great price Christ paid to redeem us from this corrupt world. He paid the ultimate price to purchase us and therefore we do not have ultimate control of what we do (1 Corinthians 6:19—20) but we should be slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:16—23).

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