

I) V30-34 INTRO: And He said to what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what

II) Jesus has given a series of parables that relate to the purpose and growth of the church

The first parable (of the soils) revealed that there are reasons people reject the gospel

III) Even when they see remarkable changes in those they know, they still refuse Jesus

They may say: I just don't believe in God, or I'm not convinced that there is a God

IV) It is common today for people to think that all religions lead to the same end  
For some, there is no reason to believe that there is only one faith that is true

V) It is common to hear it said that *all religions* reveal one aspect of what God is like

They confidently say not any single religion can explain or reveal all there is about Him

IV) This thought was captured in a poem by the American poet John Godfrey Saxe  
In 1872, he wrote the poem *The Blind Man and The Elephant*  
In the poem he wrote of six blind men who encountered an elephant and described it

VI) One blind man ran into its side, and thought it was like a wall  
A second blind man felt the tusk, and thought it was like a spear  
Another grabbed the trunk, and thought it was like a snake  
The fourth touched its knee and thought it was like a tree  
The fifth blind man touched the ear, and said it is like a fan!  
Finally, the sixth seized the tail and thought it was very much like a rope

VI) The poem ends by saying:  
And so these men of Indostan, disputed loud and long, each in his own opinion, exceeding stiff and strong, Though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!

So, often in theological wars, the disputants, I (think), tread on in utter ignorance, of what each other mean, and (talk at length) about the elephant *not one of them* has seen!

VII) Today, this is the how many self-professing agnostics speak  
Why make a big deal about something that you can't really know for sure?

VIII) This is where Christians would disagree  
God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus, and Jesus taught us about His Father

Jn 1:18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

IX) Because people reject the gospel, Jesus gave His men insight into why this happens

It happens because the soil of a person's heart is not always receptive to God's word

I) He went on to say that some would receive the word, and it would bear fruit  
These would be saved, and each would produce according to its own faith and capacity

II) Part of the fruit of their salvation would be that they would become witnesses

III) This was illustrated by the parable of the lamp placed on a lampstand  
In this parable He made it clear that they were to bring light to those in darkness

Their purpose was to bring the light of the gospel to a sin darkened world

IV) The parable of the lampstand revealed man's responsibility of giving the gospel

The message would be light shining into man's darkness, and bring salvation

V) This is what the knowledge of God is intended to do

Ps 18:28 For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God *will enlighten my darkness*

VI) As lampstands, we are to shine forth the light of the gospel of Jesus

This is done when we let our light shine before men

Ro 10:13-15 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

VII) We do not put it under a basket, but we let it shine

Like the old song said: This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

VIII) Those who believe the message will be blessed but those who refuse are

judged

IX) This is why we are careful with *what* we hear (Mk 4:24), and *how* we hear (Lu 8:18)

We are to carefully hear the word of truth, and we are to mix that word with faith

Jas 1:21 Therefore, putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with humility the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

X) We have seen that the purpose of the church is to scatter God's seed by sharing it

In the end, our part is to faithfully sow the seed, but it is the Lord who saves the hearer

XI) V28 The earth yields crops by itself

It is the farmer's responsibility to sow the seed, but it is God who produces the increase

The sower does not take the credit for conversions because it is God who saves

1 Co 3:7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

I) The Parable of the seed growing in secret emphasized God producing salvation

This next and last parable gives insight into the growth of the church over time

II) V30 Then He said To what shall we liken the kingdom of God?

III) It must have been difficult for the disciples to grasp what Jesus was saying to them

On one hand, they could track with Him concerning some basic things

IV) They most likely understood Him when He spoke of people's responses to the message

They had already seen some respond with antagonism, and others superficially

They also saw how some would come around for a while, and then just disappear

V) When Jesus spoke of being a light, that would be something they could understand

Is 42:6 I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations

Is 49:6b I will make you as a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth

VI) When He said be careful what you hear, they understood what He meant

This was a call for them to be spiritually discerning

Jer 23:16 This is what the Lord Almighty says: Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord

VII) SPURGEON: Discernment is not a matter of simply telling the difference between right and wrong; rather it is telling the difference between right and *almost* right

VIII) When He spoke of the work of God in salvation, they would have understood Him

Is 12:2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and He *has become my salvation*

IX) In spite of this, this way of life and ministry was all new to them

The thought of a group of people following Jesus that extended to the future was new

X) They would learn that God's plan of salvation was going to extend to the entire world

Not only would Israel have an opportunity of knowing God, but so would Gentiles

This was, at that time, completely a mystery to them

XI) Later, Paul would make it very clear

Eph 3:1-6 Paul spoke of a mystery now revealed, that Gentiles would be partakers of His promise in Christ *through the gospel*

I) What is going to be the product of all of our efforts? What is going to happen?

This parable gives insight into the future of the church, on earth

II) Some believe this parable speaks of the amazing growth of the church over history

The small seed's incredible growth is viewed as the spread of Christianity, over time

III) The birds nesting under and in the branches are seen as people *at home in the church*

One commentator said: Great results develop from small beginnings

IV) Obviously: The amazing growth of the church over time is the witness of history

- V) The fact is: Jesus began His work with a small number of followers  
Lu 10:1 tells us that He had 70 disciples and Mk 3:14 tells us He had 12 apostles
- VI) These are very few people intended to take this message into the future  
Compared to the population of the entire Roman Empire, or to those living in Israel, or even to the multitudes listening to Him for selfish reasons, Jesus' genuine followers were small in number
- VII) Eleven of His men came from the north, and one from Kerioth (30 mi S of Jerusalem)  
They were ordinary fishermen and small business owners, as well as a tax collector  
None were famous in Israel and outside of their villages, were relatively unknown  
None were recognized as theologians, and none were famous for their preaching skills
- VIII) When Jesus called them, none of them had ever traveled far outside of Israel  
The furthest would be to southern Lebanon (Tyre and Sidon--Mk 7:24)  
For them, the thought that Jesus' mission would become *worldwide* was unheard of
- IX) To prepare them for the future Jesus imparted vision to His men  
Mt 9:37-38 He said to His disciples, The *harvest is plentiful*, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest  
Jn 4:35 Do you not say There are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!
- X) This would have readied them for ministry in their nation
- XI) After His death and resurrection, Jesus prepared them for worldwide ministry  
Mk 16:15 *Go into all the world* and preach the gospel to every creature  
Ac 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, *and to the end of the earth.*
- I) For many, this would explain His parable of a mustard seed
- II) V31 Jesus said it is *smaller than all the seeds on earth*  
Some will point out that the wild orchid's seed is much smaller than the mustard seed  
They say this to point out that Jesus was wrong and the bible has errors

III) Jesus was speaking to a group of people who were familiar with mustard seeds

This was something that they would have been able to understand, quickly

IV) Also, *seeds on the earth* can be translated seeds that are on the ground, or soil  
He would have used this illustration because it was something they would understand

V) The use of the mustard seed was common in Israel to refer to something small  
Mt 17:20 Jesus spoke of having faith as a mustard seed to illustrate genuine faith

A small seed can produce wonderful results

VI) In this parable, Jesus says that this small seed grows (according to Mt 13:32) into a tree

Mk 4:32 says that it shoots out large branches with birds nesting under it

Mt 13:32 says the birds nest in it

VII) When you consider this, the growth of the church over the centuries has been amazing

The Christian gospel has gone out over the face of the earth, reaching multitudes

VIII) By the power of the Spirit courageous preachers combed the world to make disciples

The book of Acts records the remarkable spread of the gospel from Jerusalem (Ac 1:8)

IX) Ultimately Paul heard the gospel, was saved, and immediately began preaching

Ac 9:20 Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God

X) His life's mission was to share the gospel with all who would hear

He began traveling throughout the world, preaching the gospel

Ro 15:20-21 I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.

XI) By 53 AD The gospel had been preached in various places

Ac 17:6 These who have turned *the world upside down* have come here

too.

XII) The gospel spread from Jerusalem to Europe, eventually touching multitudes  
Over the years entire nations have been touched by the gospel

I) Even today, at this moment we are reaching a number of nations, online  
The gospel continues going forth, and many continue coming to faith in  
Jesus

II) What had small beginnings ends up reaching multitudes  
Rev 7:9-10 After these things I looked, and behold, a *great multitude*  
which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing  
before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches  
in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our  
God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

III) The kingdom of God has spread throughout the world and continues doing so

IV) Because of this many think Jesus is speaking of the spread of the gospel over  
the years

The question remains: Is this what Jesus is talking about

V) Is He saying the church will outgrow its insignificant beginnings and become  
massive?

Is the church destined to surpass in glory and size man's kingdoms, *on  
earth*

VI) This brings us to a second interpretation of the parable  
It could speak of the church growing numerically large, but filled with  
unbelievers

VII) How can we arrive at such an interpretation?

VIII) V32 Jesus said the mustard plant shoots out large branches and birds nest  
under it

Mt 13:32 says 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*

IX) When Jesus speaks of birds nesting under its shade, it refers to it as a place of  
comfort

In Matthew, when He said they nest in its branches, it speaks of making  
a home

X) This could speak of the church, over time, becoming infected with evil  
WHY: Because in the parable of the soils, *birds* were representative of

## **Satan (V4, 15)**

**XI) Numerically it is large, but spiritually it has lost its purity because it has been infiltrated**

**XII) This is where Christians can become confused  
They think that numeric growth means God is moving, which isn't necessarily true**

**XIII) We need to remember that not all growth is good! (Man with tumors in his chest)**

**XIV) The real question is: How could non-Christians ever become comfortable in Church?**

**I) It isn't that non-Christians are not welcome to attend church services  
1 Co 14:23 speaks of unbelievers coming into a church service**

**II) Paul goes on to say  
1 Co 14:24 But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all**

**III) Prophecy: Revealing the mind of God  
When God's mind is revealed through the clear exposition of scripture or the clear presentation of His word ministered by the people, the conviction of the Holy Spirit causes unbelievers to be converted as the Spirit convicts them**

**IV) One of the purposes of church gatherings is for the equipping of the saints  
As the church is taught, it goes forth and shares with others**

**V) When an unbeliever is in a service, it is normal for them to become uncomfortable  
1 Co 14:25 Paul said the desired result would be that they would fall down on their face and worship God and report that God is truly among you**

**VI) It is not the purpose of the church to attempt to look and sound like the world  
It is our purpose to, by the way that we are, reveal God to those who don't know Him**

**VII) Jesus gave another parable that will help us to see this: The Wheat and Tares  
Mt 13:24-25 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.**

**V36-39 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." He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of**



**Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil**

**VIII) QUESTION: How could unbelievers ever infiltrate the church and become comfortable**

**The church will be guilty of going to sleep while on guard duty  
What will make the church susceptible to this taking place?**

**X) The Bible will no longer be respected as the true revelation of God  
HISTORICALLY: The church has regarded God's Word for what it, in truth, is**

**1 Th 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.**

**I) Many Pastors and teachers have stopped teaching the full counsel of God**

**II) One TV preacher said he does not teach the Bible because people don't believe it**

**Amos 8:11-12 Behold, the days come, says the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it.**

**III) Because there is no genuine Bible teaching, truth will no longer be tolerated  
Bible studies become boring because people thirst for entertainment or good feelings**

**Is 30:9-10 That this is a rebellious people, Lying children, Children who will not hear the law of the LORD; Who say to the seers, "Do not see," And to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.**

**IV) False teachers now can infiltrate and introduce error under the cloak of truth**

**2 Pe 2:1-2 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.**

**V) The result is: The church is attended, but is not truly converted**

**1 Ti 4:1-2 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.**

**VI) The church may appear large, but it is unholy and filled with disobedience and unbelief**

**VII) The temptation is to use our own efforts to clean up the Church  
Some establish man made regulations, intending to force people to be holy  
This simply is legalism**

**VIII) The fact is: We can't always judge by appearances  
Some Wheat matures slowly  
We just keep teaching the Word and let God sort out the rest**

**IX) V33-34 With many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it  
He continued teaching and continued giving deeper insights to His disciples**