

SACRED STORIES: The Parables of Jesus

Supernatural Kingdom Growth | *Matthew 13:24–30*

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The first parable that Jesus told was the parable of “*The Sower, the Seed, and the Soil*” – it was a story about the kind of heart in which the Word of God can go deep and grow and produce a harvest in a person’s life. Today, we are looking at the next three parables that Matthew records. In Matthew’s mind, these three parables belong together because they all share the same theme in common: *the Growth of the Kingdom*.

OUTLINE | *Parable Sandwich*

- Parable 1: Wheat & Tares (story) | *13:24–30*
 - Parable 2: Mustard Seed (story) | *13: 31–32*
 - Parable 3: Leaven (story) | *13:33*
- Parable 1: Wheat & Tares (explanation) | *13:34–43*

THE KINGDOM GROWS LIKE WHEAT & TARES

~ *Matt 13:24–30; 34–43* ~

All these parables are about the “*kingdom of heaven*”.¹ Matthew uses this phrase over 30 times.

- What does this mean? For starters, it means that these parables aren’t about the United States. They aren’t about Israel. They aren’t about any localized, geopolitical nation. These parables are about the kingdom of heaven.
- *What is the kingdom of heaven?*
 - It is the kingdom that belongs to the God of heaven.² The prophet Daniel speaks of the “**God of heaven [who] will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed**” (**Dan 2:44**),³ “**an everlasting kingdom**” (**4:3**).
 - Matthew is the only gospel writer to use the phrase, “kingdom of heaven”. Every other writer uses the phrase, “kingdom of God.” Matthew had his reasons for using this phrase,⁴ but he makes it clear later in his book that these two phrases mean the same thing.⁵ He’s not talking about some a celestial realm (a paradise called “Heaven” somewhere up in the clouds). To say, “*the kingdom of heaven*” is to say, “*the realm in which God is King*”. And where does this realm exist? ***Heaven & Earth***.
 - **Matthew 4:17**, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is *at hand*.”
 - **Matthew 4:23**, “Now Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching *the gospel of the kingdom*...”
 - **Matthew 12:28**, “Surely the kingdom of God *has come upon you*” (Luke 7:22–23).
 - **Matthew 21:5**, (as Jesus entered Jerusalem), “Behold, *your King is coming to you*.”
 - **Matthew 28:18**, “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth*.”
 - **1 Cor. 15:25**, “*He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet*.”

When Matthew says, “*the kingdom of heaven*” and the other writers say, “*the kingdom of God*”, they all mean “*the kingdom of Jesus*”.

¹ Matthew 13:11, 24, 31, 38, 43, 44, 45, 47.

² Psa 10:16; 29:10; 145:13.

³ See also Ezek 37:25.

⁴ The most likely reason for Matthew’s phrase is owing to the fact that he was writing to a Jewish audience, and the Jews would not speak the name of God out of a sense of reverence. Scholars tells us that the Jews would often substitute the word “heaven” when they were referring to God.

⁵ See Matt 19:23–24.

Here, Jesus tells a story about what growth looks like in His Kingdom;– which nobody understood (because that was the point of parables). It was a way of judging those who didn't want to hear the truth. However, for those who did have hearts that longed for truth, the parables were a way of teaching them truths that they would never forget – but the only way to get this truth was to go to Jesus.

This is so important:

- You won't find the truth by looking inside yourself.
- You won't find the truth by meditation or by becoming religious.
- You won't find the truth by watching the nightly news.

There are *all kinds of ways* to learn *all kinds of things* (about yourself and the world you live in), but the only way to learn the truth that sets you free is by coming to Jesus. That was true then; and it's true now.

So, when Jesus is done speaking, the disciples followed Him into the place where He was staying (**they came to Him**), and they asked Him to explain the parable the wheat and tares (**13:36**). And so He does...⁶

- The sower of the good seed: *the Son of Man* = Jesus (**13:37**)
- The field: *the world* (**13:38**)

Two plants grow in this field: *wheat & weeds*.

- The good seeds: *sons of the kingdom* = those who have submitted their life to King Jesus
- The tares: *sons of the wicked one* = those who have not submitted to King Jesus.⁷
- The sower of the tares: *the enemy, the devil* (**13:39**) = which was **an actual practice**.⁸
- The harvest: *the end of the age*
- The reapers: *the angels*
- The end of the story: *the wicked are gathered up and cast into fire* (**13:40–42**)
- The end of the story: *the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom* (**13:43**)

THREE TRUTHS that we should highlight from this story...

1. In the kingdom of Jesus, the wicked & the righteous **“both grow together”** (**13:30**).
 - a. At your workplace, there are going to be believers & unbelievers.
 - b. When you gather on Sunday, there are going to be believers & unbelievers.
 - c. You are going to do business with believers & unbelievers.
 - i. You can't get around it.
 - ii. The kingdom of God is a mixed field.
 - iii. *And that makes life here...interesting* 😊
 1. The last time my son and I went to get our **hair cut**, I had to prep him...⁹
 2. When I was working with the **landscape** crew down in Savage, MN or **UPS** in Maple Grove, MN – I was surrounded by believers and unbelievers.
 3. In you **school**, in your **college**, in your **apartment** building...God has ordained that you be surrounded by wheat and tares...which means that you are surrounded by opportunities!
2. In the kingdom of Jesus, the wicked & the righteous **“both grow...”** (**13:30**).

⁶ Jer 29:13; 33:3; Luke 12:32.

⁷ For a while, it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the wheat & tares – until the wheat ripens and produces grain.

⁸ Sowing tares in another person's field was a specific & common enough crime for the Romans to have a law against it. The point here is that **it isn't an accident**. There is deliberate intentionality behind the wickedness that we see all around us. There is an enemy at work (John 10:10; 1 Pet 5:8).

⁹ John 17:14–15, God calls us to be in the world but not of the world.

- a. Often, I hear Christians lamenting at how wickedness seems to be growing. And they're not wrong. That's part of what Jesus is teaching in the parable. In His field, there are tares...and the tares **grow**.
- b. But so does the good seed! They **both** grow. Wickedness does not take over this field. Yes, wickedness is growing (and it will continue to grow), but do you know what is growing right alongside it? The children of God (the ones who inherit the kingdom;¹⁰ the Christians).

The weeds do not take over this field, and God does not give up on this field.

God has not given up on this world. God has not forgotten the promises that He made regarding this world.¹¹ God has established His kingdom here on this earth.¹² Jesus is continuing to build His church, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.¹³

- c. Yes, wickedness is growing...but so is the church.
3. Someday, a harvest is coming (**13:30**).
 - a. Wickedness won't be with us forever.
 - b. The tares don't make it to the barn. Their story ends with fire.
 - c. But, for the children of God, their story ends in the kingdom of their Father.

As the ministry of Jesus continued, and the opposition intensified, it would have been easy for the disciples to grow increasingly fearful and discouraged about the future. And this is also true for us. **And that makes these other two stories really important!**

It's not accident that, in between **the story** of the tares growing in God's field and **the explanation** of the story, Jesus tells two stories about **the unstoppable success of His kingdom**. Jesus knows that when we are surrounded by wickedness, it is easy to feel *discouraged* and to get *a false sense of what is happening* in His field. Yes, wickedness grows... but look at how the kingdom of God grows.

IT GROWS LIKE A MUSTARD SEED

~ *Matt 13:31-32* ~

Compared to all the other agricultural plants in ancient Israel, **the mustard seed was the smallest**.

- This is a picture of the kingdom of Jesus. It starts smaller than everything else around it. In the beginning, you can barely see it.
 - And that's exactly how Christianity started. *No-name parents. Lowly manger. Lowly audience. Raised in a no-name town in an insignificant region of the Roman empire. Unimpressive disciples. Died alone. Buried alone. Throughout the entire world, there were only about 120 people who believed in Him. That's small* – like a mustard seed.
- But the mustard seed doesn't stay small. It grows. And it continues to grow...until it becomes a tree that is big enough for **the birds of the air to build nests in its branches**.
 - Scholars tell us that **the mustard plant of Palestine** often grows to over 12 feet high – which makes it a tree compared to all the other agricultural plants in the field. It started as the smallest of all the garden plants, and it grows to become **the biggest** of all the garden plants.
 - This has been the **story of the kingdom of Jesus over the past 2,000 years**. It has continued to grow and spread.
 - Global Christianity was once the size of this church (c. 120 people). Today, there are over **2 billion people** across the globe who profess to believe in Jesus Christ. **New churches** are being planted every day. **His Word** has become the best-selling book in history, and efforts are being made to have it **translated** into every language within the next 3 years. This seed has become the largest plant in the field.¹⁴

¹⁰ Luke 12:32; Rev 5:10.

¹¹ Hab 2:14.

¹² 1 Chr 17:11-12; Psalm 45:6; Dan 4:3; 7:13-14; Zech 14:9; Luke 1:30-33; Rev 11:15;

¹³ Matt 16:18.

¹⁴ The bird's nest is a picture of how this plant (the kingdom of Jesus) has become a blessing to the rest of the world. As Christianity spreads, it has proven to be a blessing to every part of society whether you believe in Jesus or not.

IT GROWS LIKE LEAVEN

~ *Matt 13:33* ~

The leaven (a fermenting agent) is put into the flour (just like a seed is put into the soil), and for a moment, nobody can see it. It disappears as it were. You might be tempted to think that the leaven was gone, but that's because you don't know how God designed leaven to work. When it is buried in the flour, God designed leaven to spread and penetrate and grow until it quite literally takes over the flour.¹⁵

How does this story end? The leaven takes over the flour.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

In all 3 stories, the kingdom of heaven looks unimpressive in the beginning.

- The wheat is *surrounded* by weeds.
- The seed is *buried* in the soil.
- The leaven is *hidden* in the flour.

Yet, in all 3 stories, the kingdom of heaven continues to grow until it covers everything.

- The wheat becomes the only crop in the barn.
- The seed becomes a tree that towers over the garden.
- The leaven takes over every part of the flour.

So, yes, wickedness may be growing all around us, but oh how the kingdom of Jesus is growing!

God is at work in His world!

Which means that God is at work in you. Though you may feel small, unseen, hidden away, surrounded by people or situations that make life hard...God sees you, and He knows what He is doing in your life.

He is working in your life (in this moment, in all of your hardships, in all of your mistakes, in all of your tears, in all of your situations) in ways that you could not even begin to imagine.

You are part of the kingdom of Jesus.

He is at work in His kingdom.

He is working in your life.

And in all of these things, the best is yet to come.

¹⁵ "When a Jewish girl was married, her mother would give her a small piece of leavened dough from a batch baked just before the wedding. From that gift of leaven the bride would bake bread for her own household throughout her married life. That gift, simple as it was, was among the most cherished that the bride received, because it represented the love and blessedness of the household in which she grew up and that would be carried into the household she was about to establish" (MacArthur, 323).

¹⁶ "This process of leavening is mysterious, secret, inexorable, and impossible to thwart. The birds of the air can pick seeds off the path, but here the leaven cannot be extricated from the loaf. The thing is done, and the only thing required is time. What do you tell yourself when you read the terrible headlines, or you read about the prospect of so-and-so getting elected? Tell yourself that this woman knew her business, and the leaven is in the loaf. We can't get it out. Sorry. How does leaven work? It works by releasing carbon dioxide as the loaf warms, filling the loaf with thousands of little pockets of air, breath, wind, carbon dioxide. Bread that has risen is bread that is filled with the Spirit. And the loaf that will rise in this way is the entire world" ([Doug Wilson](#)).