

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church  
**Matthew 13:31-35 | The Kingdom of God is Not What We Think**  
Sunday April 14, 2024

**WELCOME:**

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 13.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—feel free to grab those as you come in.

**REVIEW:**

We are at a turning point in Jesus' ministry.

In Matthew 13, Jesus changes His teaching style from a straightforward, Biblical, and somewhat familiar Rabbinic way— to unfamiliar stories and riddles—called parables.

 *Parable: a simple story that illustrates a profound spiritual truth.*

A parable points beyond itself to something greater.

Jesus made this change because the Pharisees and Scribes— who represent the nation of Israel—similar to our mayors, governors and senators...

They not only rejected Jesus as their Messiah and Savior—they told the nation that Jesus was Satan. (Matt 12:24).

They told their people that Jesus gets His miraculous powers from the devil!

Wow! Think about it— The pastors, priests and ministers called The Son of God—the prince of darkness.

They couldn't have been more wrong!

It's similar to how certain pastors tell their congregations that God wants them to be happy healthy and wealthy—not true.

What is true is that God wants us holy—and from His holiness comes His happiness.

Regardless, sin has consequences. False teaching has repercussions.

So, in a sense, parables are a form of judgment on Israel.

If you look at your Bibles, Matthew 13:1-9—we've looked at the Parable of the Soils.

Then, in verses 18-23, Jesus explained it to His Disciples.

And we learned that 75% of people will ultimately reject the Gospel.

Some will reject it right away. Others will reject it years or even decades later.

But only 25% will have the faith to believe — only a remnant

Last Sunday, we studied the second parable—*The Parable of the Weeds*.

In this parable, Jesus incorporated <sup>the Jews</sup> their favorite theme—“*The Kingdom of Heaven*.”

They thought of 1 Samuel 8:5—***Give us a King!*** It's time to overthrow Caesar!

And don't you think that every time Jesus performed a miracle, the crowds thought — *It won't be long now!*

The problem, however, is that their thinking was to earthy and worldly.

IT WAS WAY TOO POLITICAL — MUCH LIKE OUR THINKING TODAY.

So the parables are to readjust and reorient our thinking from earthly to the heavenly.

**LW KEYPOINT:**

*The Kingdom of Heaven is God's rule and administration through the Lord Jesus Christ, both now and forever.*

The main point from last week's parable is that God allows Believers and unbelievers to live side by side, whether in the church, at work, in government, in schools, or even in our own families.

Some people wonder why God doesn't just send fire from Heaven and consume everyone who is evil.

I had a mentor who said, "Yeah, that's a great idea—let's have God start with you!"

There is a reason that when we baptize people, we don't hold them under and send them directly to glory!

We learn those reasons from these "Kingdom-based parables" in Matthew 13.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Today, we're looking at two parables—*The Parable of the Mustard Seed* and *The Parable of the Leaven/Yeast*.

These parables are short and belong together. Each one should help us understand the other.

Yet, much of Jesus' teachings are paradoxical—especially the parables.

Paradox—seems contradictory and yet remains true.

MAT 18:3 — "Unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

And what we were going to learn today is that the Kingdom of Heaven (today on the Earth) is not what we think.

Jesus will teach us through <sup>two</sup> simple illustrations—seeds and yeast.

What's that have to do with you?! Everything!

*\*Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.\**

**SCRIPTURE:**

**Matthew 13:31**—He presented another parable to them: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

**Matthew 13:32**— It's the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches."

**Matthew 13:33**— He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and mixed into fifty pounds of flour until all of it was leavened."

**Matthew 13:34**— Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables, and he did not tell them anything without a parable,

**Matthew 13:35**— so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:

***I will open my mouth in parables;***

***I will declare things kept secret  
from the foundation of the world.***

*These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.*

**PRAY:**

***I will meditate on your precepts  
and think about your ways.***

***I will delight in your statutes;  
I will not forget your word. (Psalm 119:15/16)***

**EXEGESIS:**

**Matthew 13:31**—He presented another parable to them: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

The Kingdom of Heaven describes God's rules, regulations, governmental policies, and administration through the Lord Jesus Christ as the King of kings.

As Believers, we submit to King Jesus along with the rulers of our nation.

(Romans 13 commands us to obey our rulers unless they tell us to do something that is contrary/directly opposes God's Word.)

It's important to understand that when Jesus speaks of “The Kingdom of Heaven,” he is referring to His Kingdom on Earth today.

We've learned that God's Kingdom is spiritual today—because Believers are the Kingdom.

(we) = True church

But there will be a day when Jesus returns and establishes a physical Kingdom from Jerusalem.

Until Jesus returns, the era in which we live is referred to as the “Church Age.”

Now that term, *The Church Age* is not found in Scripture—just like the term “Bible” or “Trinity.”

However, as secular historians divide human history into epochs— Middle Ages, Modern Age, Postmodern Age, etc.—

Biblical history does the same thing—these eras are called *dispensations*.

So what the *Church Age* communicates is the period of time from Pentecost (Acts 2) to the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The church has been living in this Church Age for the past 2,000 years.

So all that to say this—when Jesus refers to the Kingdom of Heaven throughout these parables in Matthew 13—

He is referring to the Kingdom of Heaven on the Earth right now.

But when 1 Thess 4 happens - Rapture - The Lord shows in a new  
When Jesus returns; everything changes. Dispensation called "the End of the Age"

**Matthew 13:31(B)**— "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

**Mark 4:30**— And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to describe it?"

From the very beginning, Jesus is getting everyone to think.

Jesus was fond of the mustard seed.

He used it as an illustration in all the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

He even used a mustard seed to illustrate forgiveness in Luke 17:4-6.

In any event, this is the second time Jesus refers to the *Kingdom of Heaven* (on Earth) as a seed.

A physical seed is the means of propagating life from one generation to another.

Figuratively, a seed illustrates dying to ourselves, being sanctified through the Holy Spirit, and finishing life well into maturity.

In other words, when God gives someone the faith to believe the Gospel they are slowly transformed from death to life.

The apostle Peter...

+ **1 Peter 1:23**—because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.

Imperishable seed is the Gospel

In other words, just as a seed transforms into a plant—we too are a new creation!

The apostle Paul...

+ **2 Corinthians 5:17**—if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!

Praise God that He has made us new!

Just as the plant is new from the seed itself

+ **Matthew 13:31**—“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

**Question:** Who’s the man?

It’s interesting that this parable sits in the middle of the *Parable of the Weeds* (from last week) and Jesus’ explanation of it.

The position of this parable is neither an accident or a coincidence.

Within His explanation, of the *Parable of the Soils*, Jesus told us that the man— is the *Son of Man*, which is Jesus Himself.

So, we don’t want to unnecessarily borrow imagery from other parables.

But, at the same time, we can’t deny where Matthew placed this parable.

Just as a good real estate agent promotes location, location, location—

In Scripture, content and context is king (apart from Jesus.)

All that to say this:

**KEYPOINT 1:**

*Today's parables are not a separate lesson, but rather a continuation of the Parable of the Weeds.*

In fact, we will see these parables building upon one another as we study this chapter together.

**Matthew 13:32(a)**— *It's the smallest of all the seeds,*

A mustard seed is the size of a piece of salt.

Now, Bible critics and skeptics have jumped all over this passage, using it to question the authority and infallibility of the Bible.

They claim that Jesus made a grievous error!

What is this terrible error?

Jesus said the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds when, in fact, there are smaller seeds.

Now, before anyone throws their Bibles in the trash—let's make sure we understand the overall context of the passage.

The context in which Jesus is teaching is through a *parable*.

Jesus loves painting these amazing pictures in our minds using analogies, comparisons, and hyperbole.

We hear, read, and use hyperbole all the time today.



For example, when a sports team wins a championship and returns home, the team typically is given a victory parade.

What does the media do with their headlines?

*"The whole city turned out to welcome the team!"*

Question: Did the WHOLE city actually show up?

No. Now, did people cancel their subscriptions because of the headline?

Why? Hyperbole.

So, this accusation from the world—that Jesus is wrong about the size of a mustard seed— is a good lesson for us today.

We are to read our Bibles and read them correctly.

Because Jesus is not speaking as a botanist, but rather within the typical everyday experience and life of a Jew living in the first century.

To understand this parable, we must get out of our own way and put ourselves in their shoes.

We need to look at the parables through the lens of Jewish history and not our American observations.

- Two things
- ① In their world, mustard seeds were the smallest <sup>seeds</sup> ~~sees~~ found in Palestinian fields.
  - ② But there's also a contextual issue that we miss as twenty-first-century Americans.

Because of its tiny size, the mustard seed was commonly used to represent tiny things.

Ancient Jewish literature refers to a drop of blood or a tiny blemish on an animal the size of a mustard seed.

Today, Arabs speak of faith weighing as little as a mustard seed, in much the same way Jesus did...

Right after the Transfiguration Jesus, Peter, James and John are walking down the mountain.

When they reach the bottom, Jesus finds the rest of the disciples in a "awkward ministry situation" with the crowd because they were unable to cast a demon out of a boy.

Jesus casts the demon out—and after things settle down...

The disciples ask Jesus why they couldn't ...

**Matthew 17:20**— "Because of your little faith," he told them. "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

So we see the comparison - Ant more hyperbole.

Back to our Gospel text...

**Matthew 13:32(b)**— but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree,

What's Jesus' point so far?

**KEY POINT #2**  
We are not to be discouraged tiny beginnings.

**Zechariah 4:10**—For who despises the day of small things?

We are to adjust our perspective—microwave theology—and focus on eternal perspectives.

**Matthew 13:32(b)**— *but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree,*

Now critics also jump on Jesus statement, pointing out that a mustard plant is a shrub, not a tree.

**Question:** Have you ever seen a mustard plant in Israel?

Now, I'm not a botanist, nor do I play one on TV...but I ask because there are many varieties of mustard plants.

Many of them are rather small—however, some species of mustard plants in Palestine often grow to twelve or fifteen feet tall.

### PICTURE

Look, at the messiness of that tree—it's not a beautiful Oak Tree—but it can house hundreds of birds.

**Matthew 13:32(c)**— *so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches."*

Here, we see an unusual twist in Jesus' parable.

The Kingdom of Heaven (on Earth) will become like a large tree so large that birds will come and nest in it.

We think, "Praise God!"

However, throughout the Bible, when birds are mentioned allegorically, like in this parable—birds represent evil.

Maybe Alfred Hitchcock was on to something...

**Proverbs 27:8**—Anyone wandering from his home is like a bird wandering from its nest.

**Jeremiah 5:27**—Like a cage full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit.

**Lamentations 3:52**—For no reason, my enemies hunted me like a bird.

**Revelation 18:2**—He (the angel) called out in a mighty voice:  
It has fallen,  
Babylon the Great has fallen!  
She has become a home for demons,  
a haunt (prison) for every unclean spirit,  
a haunt for every unclean bird,  
and a haunt for every unclean and despicable beast.

In the *Parable of the Soils*, the birds represent the Evil One / aka the devil's messengers. (Matt. 13:19)

Look where the devil's messengers are now nesting,

**Matthew 13:32(d)**— so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches.”

The Greek verb for nest is *kataskēnoō*.

The picture here is that unbelievers are now living, residing, and have settled right next to Believers—as the Kingdom of Heaven (on Earth) grows.

What's the takeaway so far?

**Matthew 13:31**— “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

**Matthew 13:32**— It's the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches.”

**KEYPOINT 2:** 3

*The Kingdom of Heaven, though tiny and insignificant to the world, would one day grow into a massive body of Believers—regardless of the unbelievers living alongside.* *-ON EARTH*

If this parable is built on the one from last week—*The Parable of the Weeds*—there are a lot of people who say they're Believers but aren't.

There are a lot of weeds mixed in with the wheat.

Remember how Judas betrayed Jesus —Judas was living alongside Jesus...even Jesus is not exempt!

**Matthew 13:33(a)**— He told them another parable: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven.”

Leaven—A fermented fungus that causes the dough to rise.

Think of it like yeast.

The leaven used in first century Israel was a piece of dough kept back from a previous baking so they can use it again.

In the OT, leaven had to be removed from the Jewish homes during Passover (Ex. 12:15–19; 13:7).

It was excluded from the sacrifices (Ex. 34:35), (with the exception of the loaves used at the Feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15–21)).

In most cases, when leaven or yeast is mentioned allegorically in the New Testament, it's a symbol of evil—similar to the birds.

For example:

Jesus used leaven to shine a light on hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), expose false teaching (Matt. 16:6–12), and reveal worldly compromise (Matt. 22:16–21).

Paul used leaven to address carnality in the church (1 Cor. 5:6–8) as well as false doctrine (Gal. 5:9).

### **KEYPOINT 3:**

*Leaven is symbolic for sin because it quietly permeates the church from the inside out—as yeast does the dough.*

Yeast in flour is alien to its natural constitution.

Yeast is a foreign element when placed in flour.

And the baking process brings about its dramatic reaction.

Some have argued that leaven/yeast is not always a symbol of evil in Scripture—and that is true.

Sometimes yeast is simply yeast. / birds

But when yeast has a symbolic meaning, it almost always represents something evil rather than good.

Please know that Jesus is not saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is evil...

**Matthew 13:33(c)**— *"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and mixed into fifty pounds of flour until all of it was leavened."*

From the practical side of this parable, we'll notice that this woman is ambitious—fifty pounds of flour!

That's enough flour to feed a small village of 100 people.

That's a lot of dough...literally.

Believe it or not, that was about the same amount of bread Abraham asked Sarah to bake for the Lord and His angels. (Gen. 18:6).

But what about spiritually?

#### **KEYPOINT 4:5**

*The mustard seed illustrates the outward expansion of the Kingdom, while the leaven represents the inward expansion of evil.*

*there's the PARADOX.*

Do you see the rub? Do you see why these two parables should be taught together?

God's Kingdom is expanding on the Earth, but it's also infested with evil from the inside,

Jesus said...

**Matthew 16:18**—*I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

It's within the Kingdom of Heaven (on Earth) where Jesus builds His church and, simultaneously, the world is building theirs.

These parables are disturbing, yet, it's been this way from the beginning.

**Matthew 11:12**—From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have been seizing it by force.

What did King Herod do to John the Baptizer?

*- Parable of the weeds*  
Last week, we learned that the devil places counterfeit Christians among true Believers to hinder God's work in God's Kingdom.

The apostle Paul writes to Timothy.

**2 Timothy 4:3**—For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear.

**2 Timothy 4:4**—They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Why are there counterfeit Christians in every church? Because God said.

Why do they believe in a counterfeit Gospel? Because God said, they would.

Why do people love their counterfeit righteousness and their counterfeit church? Because God said.

People love their counterfeit church because sin is not sin— but rather behavior that should be managed. (Just try harder!)

People love their counterfeit church because Salvation has become self-esteem—I mean, after all, Jesus loves you.

People love their counterfeit church because Jesus is more of an caricature/ illustration of how to live— instead of the perfect Son of God/ Son of Man—who will judge us according to how we lived our lives.



People love their counterfeit churches because counterfeit preachers preach worldly prosperity instead of books of the Bible.

Far be it from us to preach a gospel that exposes people's sins, makes them uncomfortable, and drives them to the Savior.

And it would seem that the counterfeit church is winning.

**KEYPOINT 5:**

*We live in the Church age—the end of the age is to come.*

We look around and think, *It won't be much longer now! Jesus has to be coming back soon!*

Every generation from the first century has thought the same thing.

Starting with Pentecost, the Roman Empire threatened the church at every turn.

Threats led to violence.

The early church had no money, no social media to get their message out or to ask for help.

They didn't have websites or logos.

They didn't even have their own copy of the Bible.

But what the early church did have— were enemies—many, many enemies.

Yet, the church grew.

Within three hundred years of Christ's dying— historians estimate that five to eight million people came to faith.

Resurrection? Ascension

Regardless of the hostility and hatred of the world—the Christian faith is more widespread than any religion, any faith, any ideology.

In fact, history has proven time and time again that the more the world persecutes the church—the faster it grows.

In nearly every nation on Earth, Christ is worshiped every day of the week.

The Kingdom's final size—at the end of the age— will amaze us.

**+** **Matthew 13:34**— *Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables, and he did not tell them anything without a parable,*

Matthew explains that Jesus' speaking in parables was not an afterthought but had been prophesied in God's Word hundreds of years earlier.

**+** **Matthew 13:35**— *so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:*

***I will open my mouth in parables;  
I will declare things kept secret  
from the foundation of the world.***

Matthew then steps away from his role as a reporter to become a commentator again.

This passage is a shorter version of verses 10-17.

Matthew wants to emphasize just how heavily Jesus relied on the use of parables at this point in His ministry by quoting Psalm 78:2

Matt tells us Jesus' teaching methodology was a fulfillment of Psalm 78:2.

In Matthew's words, all of Jesus' teachings at this phase were parables.

**PREACH:**

As we close today, Christians often discuss and debate a theological issue regarding the growth of God's Kingdom.

Some people look at these parables and say that with Kingdom growth comes the victorious and triumphant success of the Gospel.

In other words, they believe that the world is slowly getting better, more righteous, and more holy as time passes.

However, the problem is that Jesus never said that, and the rest of Scripture states the very opposite.

These parables are not teaching the worldwide success of the Gospel.

If anything, the New Testament teaches a decline in the Gospel as the end of the age draws near—and yet God's Kingdom grows slowly like a seed.

It's quite the conundrum, don't you think?

*The Kingdom of God is not what we think.*

*How do these parables impact your life today? 5 things:*

**1. Don't be discouraged <sup>by</sup> small beginnings.**

- A. The Christian life is all about starting small and walking slow.
- B. God will take your most mundane thing or situation and turn it into His glory. *-But don't rush the process*

**2. God deliberately lets us misunderstand Him!**

- A. It's not our job to make sense of everything.
- B. Romans 8:28—it's God's job to make things work together for good.

**3. The Christian life involves God getting you out of your comfort zone.**

- A. Just as you begin to become comfortable with something—next thing you know God is moving you and confusing you at the same time.

**4. God isn't looking for perfect faith, rather small faith in a perfect God!**

A. God isn't looking for great faith, but faith in a great Savior.

**5. God has a plan and it's our job to join Him with His plan.**

A. In the church age in which we live—God works slowly and subtly.

*The Kingdom of God Is Not What We Think - but we can trust God even though we may not understand Him At times.*

"I am not what I want to be. I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I hope to be. But thank God I am not what I used to be."—John Newton

### **PRAYER**

### **BENEDICTION**

***Revelation 22:20-21 - He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.***

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