

## Parables – Sowing and Reaping - Matthew 13: 24-43, Mark 4:26-29

**THEME: The parables of the Kingdom of Heaven show the direction of the Kingdom after Israel's rejection of it until the King returns to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth.**

As we have said, the Gospel of Matthew is probably the key Gospel to the Bible. It is the open door to both the Old and the New Testaments. If that is true, then chapter 13 is the key to the Gospel of Matthew. This makes chapter 13 all-important. It will give us a better understanding of what the Kingdom of Heaven is than any other place in the Book. We call it the Mystery Parables Discourse, and it is one of the three major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew.

1. The Sermon on the Mount looks back to the past. It is the law for the land.
2. The Mystery Parables Discourse reveals the condition of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world during the present age.
3. The Olivet Discourse looks to the future, to the return of the King and the things beyond this age.

Let me remind you that our Lord followed John the Baptist in preaching, "... Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat\_4:17). And our Lord enunciated the law of that Kingdom, the Sermon on the Mount. Then He demonstrated that He had the power, the dynamic, after which He sent His disciples out with the message. The message was met by rejection—Israel rejected its King. Therefore, our Lord hands down a judgment against the cities where His mighty works had been done and against the religious rulers. When they asked Him for a sign, He said that no sign would be given to them except that of Jonah. Jonah was a resurrection sign, and they were to have that fulfilled in Christ shortly after this. Finally, He gave that very personal invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (lit., "rest you")" (Mat\_11:28).

Now the question arises: What will happen to the Kingdom of Heaven? It is apparent that He will not establish it on the earth at His first coming. So what will happen to the Kingdom of Heaven during the interval between the suffering and the glory of Christ? Well, in the Mystery Parables Discourse our Lord sets before us Kingdom-of-Heaven conditions on earth during this interval, using seven or eight parables.

We call them Mystery Parables because in the Word of God a mystery is something hidden or secret up to a certain time and then revealed. The church is a mystery (according to this definition) since it was not a matter of revelation in the Old Testament. It was revealed after the death and resurrection of Christ. Actually, there could be no church until Christ died and rose again. Eph\_5:25 says that "... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."

It is important to note that the Kingdom of Heaven is not synonymous with the church nor is the church synonymous with the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven today is all Christendom (the portion of the world in which Christianity is predominant can be considered as Christendom). Obviously, the church is in Christendom, but it is not all of it by any means.

These Mystery Parables show the direction of the Kingdom after it had been offered and rejected by Israel. They reveal what is going to take place between the time of Christ's rejection and the time when He returns to the earth as King. With these parables our Lord covers the entire period between His rejection by Israel and His return to the earth to establish His Kingdom. I consider them very important. – McGee

***Mat 13:24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;***

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In this parable our Lord picks up where He left off in the parable of the sower. He has told us that only one-fourth of the sown seed ever got into good ground. The other three-fourths never did produce anything because the folk who heard the Word did not respond to it. In other words, they were not saved. Of the people who heard the Word of God, only one-fourth were truly saved. Frankly, in my own ministry I have found the percentage even lower than that. If one out of ten responding to my invitation to receive Christ is genuine, I feel that my batting average is good. Other Christian workers tell me the same story. A member of the team of a very prominent evangelist has told me that only three percent of their inquirers can be considered genuine converts. So you see, our batting average is not too good, but we thank God for each person who does come to Christ. We are in a Kingdom-of-Heaven situation, giving out the Word of God—and this is what happens to it.

But now we see another facet of the Kingdom-of-Heaven condition in the world today. It is a picture of a man who sowed good seed in his field— Mc Gee

***Mat 13:25-26 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.***

Notice who is asleep. While men slept, the enemy came. Remember, the sower is the Lord, and He neither slumbers nor sleeps. Satan is the enemy, and he sows tares among the wheat. The tares are false doctrine. There's a great deal of that type of sowing today.

As wheat and tares first begin to grow, it is difficult to distinguish between them. Frankly, a lot of cults and “ism” also sound good at first. You cannot tell them from the real thing until about the twelfth or thirteenth lesson. Those are the lessons in which they introduce their false doctrine. Someone once said to me, “Dr. McGee, you should not criticize so—and-so. I listened to him, and he preached the gospel.” Well, he does preach the gospel every now and then. But it is the other things he says that are in error. You see, he sows tares among the wheat.  
– McGee

***Mat 13:27-30 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?' 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?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. 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." ' ' ' "***

This is a very important picture to see and to interpret. Our Lord says, “Don't try to pull up the tares. Let them both grow together, and when they finally head up, you will be able to recognize which are tares and which are wheat.”

Somebody comes to me and says, “Pastor McGee, do you think the world is getting better?” I reply that I do think it is getting better. Someone else asks me, “Do you think the world is getting worse?” I tell him that I do believe the world is getting worse. A third party who heard me give both answers, says, “What are you trying to do—ride the fence? It is not like you to try to please everybody.” Right! But actually, both are true. The wheat is growing and the tares are growing. The world is getting better—the wheat is heading up. Never has there been so much Bible teaching as there is today. I thank God for that. And there are many wonderful saints of God who love His Word and who would die defending it. That wheat is growing, my friend!

However, the world is also getting worse. There are a lot of tares growing. I have been a pastor for a long time. When I began my ministry, I entered a denomination with the idea of cleaning it up. I was the one that just about

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got cleaned out. I found I could not straighten out my denomination. I was thankful to find out from this passage, and related passages, that my business was to preach the Word. I don't go around pulling up tares anymore because I found that when you pull up tares, you also pull up some wheat with them. But now I know that my business is not to pull up tares but to sow the wheat. Sowing the Word of God is my responsibility.

Both tares and wheat are growing in this world. This is a Kingdom-of-Heaven situation in Christendom during this interval between Christ's rejection and His return to establish His Kingdom upon the earth. It is not a picture of Christ's church. "Well," you say, "it certainly is a picture of the organized church." That is true, but the organized church is not His church. His church is composed of that invisible number of saints. When I say invisible, I mean that they are not confined to an organization. (Actually, I do not like the term invisible because I find out that a lot of the saints think it means that they are to be invisible Sunday night and at the midweek service. In fact, they are invisible many times.) The true church is made up of true believers, irrespective of any denomination. True believers are those who have trusted Christ as Savior, are resting in Him, and love His Word—this is the real test. Don't be disturbed that the wheat and tares are growing together. One day the Lord will put in His sickle and separate the tares and wheat. I am thankful it will not be my job because I am afraid I would pull up some of the wheat. – McGee

***Mat 13:31-32 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, 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."***

The mustard tree is an unlikely symbol of the church or of individual Christians. Ordinarily, fruit-bearing trees are used to depict believers. Mustard is a condiment and has no food value. It's not wheat germ, loaded with vitamins; it's just good on hot dogs and hamburgers. Mustard is not a food you can live on.

The mustard seed does not grow into a mighty oak like the little acorn does. It is a shrub which thrives best in desert lands.

The mustard seed "is the least of all seeds." Several years ago a liberal preacher in our area made the discovery that the mustard seed is not the least of all seeds. He thought he had found an error in the Bible. What did our Lord mean by "the least of all seeds"? It was the least of all seeds that the people in His audience knew about. It is my understanding that it is least of all the seeds in the category of plants to which the mustard belongs. It is a very small seed.

"But when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." This little seed, which should have become an herb, got to the fertilizer and became a tree large enough for birds to roost in.

This parable reveals the outward growth of Christendom as the parable of the leaven speaks of the internal condition of Christendom. The church has not converted the world, but it has had a tremendous influence on the world. Any place that Christianity has gone can be called Christendom.

This parable reveals the outward growth of the organized church. The church and the world have become horribly mixed. There has been real integration between man in the church and man in the world. They live and act very much alike in our day. The Christian should be salt in the world, not mustard!

"The birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Years ago I heard another liberal preacher interpret the birds as being different denominations. He spoke of the Baptist birds, the Presbyterian birds, the

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Methodist birds, and all other church groups as being birds. That, of course, is a contradiction of our Lord's own interpretation of the birds in the first parable. We can be sure that the birds in the parables of this discourse do not speak of anything good, but rather they represent evil. The birds are the ones that took the seed which fell by the wayside. Our Lord said that they represent the enemy who is Satan. I am afraid that Christendom today is a mustard tree filled with a lot of dirty birds! – McGee

A mustard tree (shrub) growing into an enormous tree is abnormal. The birds represent all kinds of doctrine allowed in the abnormal tree. This represents the failure of the church. – Expositor's Study Bible.

***Mat 13:33 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."***

### THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

The parable of the leaven is the key parable of this chapter. Let me try to help you realize the importance of it. First of all, the Gospel of Matthew is the key book of the Bible. Secondly, chapter 13 is the key chapter of Matthew. And thirdly, verse Mat\_13:33 is the key verse of chapter 13. So actually, what we have here is one of the key verses of the Bible!

Now notice the very important teaching in this verse—

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven”—but don't stop there—“which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal.” What does the leaven represent? There are those who interpret the leaven as the gospel, and they ought to know better! Nowhere is leaven used as a principle of good; it is always a principle of evil. The word leaven occurs ninety-eight times in the Bible—about seventy-five times in the Old Testament and about twenty-three times in the New Testament—and it is always used in a bad sense. The great scholar, Dr. Lightfoot, made the statement that rabbinical writers regularly used leaven as a symbol of evil. In the Old Testament it was forbidden to be used in the offerings made to God. In the New Testament our Lord warned to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees (see Mat\_16:6). And the apostle Paul spoke of the leaven of malice and wickedness (see 1Co\_5:8). Symbolism in Scripture does not contradict itself, and we may be certain that leaven is not used in a good sense here in Matthew 13. Leaven is not the gospel.

The gospel is represented by the three measures of meal. How do we know this? Because meal is made out of grain or seed, and our Lord has already told us in the parable of the sower that the seed represents the Word of God.

Remember that this parable is a picture of what happens to the Word of God on this earth during the interval between Christ's rejection and His exaltation when He will return to set up His Kingdom. Note what happens to the Word of God represented by the meal. This woman comes along—I hope you ladies will forgive me for pointing this out—and when a woman is used in a doctrinal sense in Scripture, she is always used as a principle of evil. She takes the leaven and hides it in the meal. If the leaven represents the gospel, why in the world did she hide it? The gospel is to be shouted from the housetops and heralded to the very ends of the earth. Obviously, the leaven is a principle of evil, and the woman puts it in the meal, which represents the gospel, the Word of God.

We certainly see this in reality in our day. There is no cult or “ism” which ignores the Bible. I find that even those who worship the Devil, the demon worshipers, use the Bible. False teachers of every description put leaven in the meal, the Word of God.

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What does leaven do? Well, leaven is a substance, such as yeast, used to produce fermentation. When it is put in bread dough, it causes it to rise. And it makes it tasty also. That is the reason a great many people find a thrill in some of the cults. Unleavened bread is just blah as far as the natural taste is concerned. A little leaven really helps it. I grew up in the South, and my mother used to make delicious biscuits. She would put leaven in the dough and put them on the back of the stove to rise. If I came running into the kitchen, she would shush me because she didn't want those biscuits to fall. When they got to a certain height, she would stop the fermentation by putting them in the oven and baking them. Have you ever seen what happens when you let dough continue to rise? I tell you, it makes a pan of corruption—something you wouldn't want to eat! Leaven is a principle of evil.

This parable teaches that the intrusion of wrong doctrine into the church will finally lead to total apostasy—"The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said, "... when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luk\_18:8). The way the question is couched in the Greek, it demands a negative answer. In other words, he is saying that when He does return the world will be in total apostasy. And the apostle Paul, writing to a young man studying for the ministry, warns that the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine (see 2Ti\_4:3). The final, total apostasy of the church is revealed in the church of Laodicea (see Rev\_3:14-19).

***Mat 13:34-35 All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, 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."***

Jesus spoke the first four parables to the multitude. The use of this teaching method by the Lord fulfilled Asaph's prophecy in Psa\_78:2 that the Messiah would speak in parables, uttering things kept secret from the foundation of the world. These features of the kingdom of heaven in its interim form, hidden until this time, were now being made known.

***Mat 13:36 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."***

Jesus has sent the multitude away and has gathered His disciples about Him. He is going to interpret the parable of the tares to them. We have already gone over it, but let's read it as the Scripture states it. - McGee

***Mat 13:37-38 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."***

In His interpretation of the wheat and tares parable, Jesus identified Himself as the sower. He sowed directly during His earthly ministry, and has been sowing through His servants in succeeding ages. The field is the world. It is important to emphasize that the field is the world, not the church. The good seeds mean the sons of the kingdom. It might seem bizarre and incongruous to think of living human beings being planted into the ground. But the point is that these sons of the kingdom were sown in the world. During His years of public ministry, Jesus sowed the world with disciples who were loyal subjects of the kingdom. The tares are the sons of the wicked one. Satan has a counterfeit for every divine reality. He sows the world with those who look like, talk like, and, to some extent, walk like disciples. But they are not genuine followers of the King. – Believers Bible Commentary

***Mat 13:39-42 The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those***

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***who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.***

The enemy is Satan, the enemy of God and all the people of God. The harvest is the end of the age, the end of the kingdom age in its interim form, which will be when Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to reign as King. The Lord is not referring to the end of the church age; it leads only to confusion to introduce the church here. The reapers are the angels (see Rev\_14:14-20). During the present phase of the kingdom, no forcible separation is made of the wheat and the darnel. They are allowed to grow together. But at the Second Advent of Christ, the angels will round up all causes of sin and all evildoers and throw them into the furnace of fire, where they will weep and gnash their teeth. – Believers Bible Commentary

***Mat 13:43 Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!***

The righteous subjects of the kingdom who are on earth during the Tribulation will enter the kingdom of their Father to enjoy the Millennial Reign of Christ. There they will shine forth as the sun; that is, they will be resplendent in glory.

Again Jesus adds the cryptic admonition, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

This parable does not justify, as some mistakenly suppose, the toleration of ungodly people in a local Christian church. Remember that the field is the world, not the church. Local churches are explicitly commanded to put out of their fellowship all who are guilty of certain forms of wickedness (1Co\_5:9-13). The parable simply teaches that in its mystery form, the kingdom of heaven will include the real and the imitation, the genuine and the counterfeit, and that this condition will continue until the end of the age. Then God's messengers will separate the false, who will be taken away in judgment, from the true, who will enjoy the glorious reign of Christ on earth. – Believers' Bible Commentary

### ***The Parable of the Seed Growing***

***Mar 4:26-29 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."***

1. Believers' responsibility is to spread the Gospel.
2. The Gospel properly sown without fail will have its proper effect.
3. Evangelism follows God's law of Sowing and Reap, which is sure as a physical law (gravity)
4. The Church will be held to account in the end times, when the harvest comes.

Source: The Expositor's Study Bible