

July 30, 2017

“The Parables of the Weeds, a Seed, and Leaven”

Matthew 13:24-43

FCF: Flawed expectations > disappointment > discouragement > disillusionment

PROPOSITION: (magnet) The coming of the Kingdom is more real than we think.
(anchor) And we need to take hold of that and take it to heart.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Expectations are the things of comedy and tragedy. Case in point – think of a man and a woman prior to marriage. Many husbands expect their wives to never change – not her hair, her looks, her tastes. But many wives expect their husbands to surely change – his manners, his opinions, his priorities. You can imagine where this is heading. It can be comical. Or tragic.

It’s possible for us to do the same with what Jesus called the gospel of the kingdom. If our expectations are wrong, we will surely end up disappointed, discouraged, and disillusioned with our faith. It’s a danger that we need to face. What are our expectations of this King?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 13:24-43](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

So where are we in this study? Chapter 13 is the third of five major teaching sections in Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus has just relayed and explained the Parable of the Soils. The question was, “*How can it be that the kingdom has come and yet has been received with little but apathy and hostility?*” Jesus addresses that with this memorable image of a sower, seed, and soils.

But there were other questions. The Old Testament spoke repeatedly of God as King. As the years went by, hope grew for a Messiah who would restore the fortunes of the nation. By the 1st century, the expectation was for a mighty ruler who would come and drive the Romans out. Well, Jesus did not live up to those expectations. But He still spoke of a kingdom – the kingdom of heaven – a reign wider and deeper than His contemporaries envisioned, breaking in with His arrival. It is a kingdom present and future, a kingdom settled and spreading, a kingdom with citizens who are to play active, daily roles. And a kingdom best explained in parables.

Which takes us to these parables, three stories that show us that, tempting as it may be at times to become disillusioned by this kingdom, we don’t need to be – not when we understand its nature. For the coming of Jesus’ kingdom is real – even though it comes with a mixed presence, with seeming insignificance, and with hidden activity. The King has come and His kingdom is real, more real than we tend to think. So we need to take hold of that and take it to heart.

I. THE MIXED PRESENCE

We might ask, “*If the kingdom has come, why does evil persist?*” The first parable addresses this, showing us that, for now, the kingdom of heaven is one with a mixed presence.

A) Background

([READ Matthew 13:24-30](#)) Now, first, a bit of background on some of the details here.

1. The enemy’s sowing

An enemy's sowing was a form of bioterrorism. It's an attempt to destroy your crop. Wheat was a critical commodity. This weed, likely a poisonous kind of ryegrass known as "darnel," looks like wheat in the early stages and you can only tell one from the other later on as they grow.

2. The gardener's patience

Which is why the master is calling for patience with such weeds among his wheat. They were tangled at the roots. He had to wait until the harvest so they could be separated properly.

B) Significance

The point? (READ Matthew 13:37-43) Again, there was this expectation that the coming of the kingdom would mean the end of the age, the disrupting of human society by the sure and utter destruction of the unrighteous. Jesus tells this parable to recast and reshape expectations.

1. The field

Now, what is the field? Some have said it's the church. But Jesus says in v.38 that the field is the world. This field and the church are not the same. The kingdom is broader than the church.

2. The weeds

So, the field is the world. What then are the weeds? Jesus says they are "the sons of the evil one," the unrepentant, the rebellious, all of whom will eventually be separated out, judged, and destroyed. This, of course, is a warning to all who are complacent and presumptuous.

3. The good seed

The good seed is said to be "the sons of the kingdom," those made righteous before God by His grace, all of whom will be gathered together, brought into His presence, and rewarded.

What Jesus is saying is that, for now, this world is mixed. The kingdom has come but the harvest still awaits. And so He urges patience and alerts His followers to expect resistance.

Application:

What does this mean? We may wish the kingdom would come fully now. But the weeds and wheat grow together. And will continue to. Christian, your service and maturing takes place in that context. That may make things complicated. But this is how the kingdom has come.

The answer then is not to prematurely try and forcibly "remove the weeds". Think of certain aspects of the Crusades. Nor is ours to "remove the wheat". Think of certain aspects of the monastic movement. Ours is neither to remove nor to withdraw. That's not our calling. Ours is to engage, to labor and love patiently and faithfully until the return of our King.

II. THE SEEMING INSIGNIFICANCE

Why does evil persist? The kingdom has a mixed presence. We need to know that. But "Why does the kingdom seem so insignificant? Why so small?" (READ Matthew 13:31-32)

A) Background

1. The size of the seed

Again, let's start with the background. The mustard seed is not literally the smallest of seeds known to man. But it was the smallest known and used at the time. Remember, Jesus' point is not a botany lesson. He is making a comparison between small beginnings and great endings.

2. Its surprising growth

For this little seed, smaller than a sesame seed, can grow to be a bush so large that it's often thought of as a tree – sometimes 8 to 12 feet in height with branches spreading out from there.

B) Significance

The point? (READ Ladd), *“Rejected by religious leaders, welcomed by tax collectors and sinners, Jesus looked more like a deluded dreamer than the bearer of the Kingdom of God.”*

1. Small beginnings

Jesus and His disciples made up a movement of very small beginnings. As did the message.

2. Dramatic growth

But those small beginnings exploded forth with dramatic growth. That's an historic fact. And I should add that the Old Testament prophets used this very image of birds resting in the branches – meaning that this message would spread beyond the confines of Israel and out to the nations.

Why so small? Jesus' answer to our concern is this. First the tiny seed, later the larger tree. The kingdom starts off small but in the end it will be astonishing how great it becomes.

Application:

Which is to then say, *“Don't overlook this message.”* The kingdom has come. Don't overlook the significance of the good news of the kingdom, the gospel, our sure standing secured before God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That has paradigm shifting, heart changing, life giving implications. Don't overlook it. In your broken relationships, your hope is the gospel. In the burden of guilt you carry, your hope is the gospel. In the shame you feel because of what's been done to you, your hope is the gospel. In the bondage of your addictions – alcohol, prescriptions, porn, food, fitness, pleasure – your hope is the gospel.

Don't overlook this message. Don't be fooled by the insignificance of the kingdom.

III. THE HIDDEN ACTIVITY

The coming of the kingdom is real – even though evil persists, even though it seems small. And even though, at times, its activity seems so very hidden (READ Matthew 13:33).

A) Background

1. Amount of leaven

Again, some background. Leaven and yeast is an interesting image. It's often used negatively in other contexts. But not here. Here the leaven or yeast is an essential ingredient added in a very small amount, so small it's really hidden. Think how little one needs to use in baking.

2. Dramatic effect

And think of what you have when you cook the dough without it – a lumpy rock. But with it, a transformation takes place as it is mixed into the dough and works its changes throughout.

B) *Significance*

The point? The issue at hand was this. In the minds of Jesus' hearers, the coming of the kingdom was to bring a complete change to things. The evil of the world was to be utterly displaced. But Jesus' ministry seemed to bring no such transformation. What was going on?

1. Hidden beginnings

His answer? When a bit of leaven is put in a mass of dough, initially nothing seems to happen.

2. Real change

But eventually, something does begin to happen – the complete transformation of the dough. The idea being that there is going to be a final, complete victory of the kingdom when the new order comes. For now, the kingdom and its effects are often hidden. But it is quietly working.

The kingdom has come. One day when our King returns, it will completely, fully, and truly transform everything. But for now, it has broken into the present quietly, imperceptibly.

Application:

For the kingdom does not come as an army or a storm. Slowly but surely, it sweeps into every arena. All is leavened. Culturally, as the gospel message is heard and applied, it touches politics, economics, the arts, medicine, sports – what is done, how it's done, and why. Relationally, it makes deep repentance, honest confession, and true forgiveness not only a command but a possibility. And then, personally, it transforms us from the inside out – remaking our understanding of who God is, of our purpose in this world, and of our very identity.

All is leavened. Sudden changes can and do come. But most often the most lasting changes come slowly over time. The coming of the kingdom is a hidden activity. But it is real.

CONCLUSION:

The kingdom has come. But we need to understand how it has come. We need to have our expectations aligned with our King's purposes. For now, His kingdom has come as a mixed presence with a seeming insignificance amidst hidden activity. For now. We need to know and grapple with that. We need not grow weary. We need not grow discouraged or disillusioned. For however hard things are now, we know how it will end. Jesus has made that quite clear.

“Dunkirk” is in the theaters now. It's been well received by critics and audiences alike. “Dunkirk” tells the story of how the Allies were pushed out of France in May 1940. But, as some of you may know, Dunkirk eventually gave way to D-Day, when the Allies pushed back into France in June 1944. Historians will tell you that, once that beachhead was secure, so too was the outcome of the war. However many skirmishes or battles were left, V-Day was coming.

We live between D-Day and V-Day. We know the outcome. We know how this ends. The mixed presence, the seeming insignificance, the hidden activity don't change that. However many skirmishes or battles are left to be fought, we know the outcome is sure. The coming of the Kingdom is more real than we often think. We need to take hold of that and take it to heart.

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