

Sunday 08-May-22

The Kingdom of God is like...

Psalm 78:1-8

A maskil of Asaph.

- ¹ My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
- ² I will open my mouth with a parable;
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
- ³ things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
- ⁴ We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
- ⁵ He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach their children,
- ⁶ so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
- ⁷ Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.
- ⁸ They would not be like their ancestors—
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
whose hearts were not loyal to God,
whose spirits were not faithful to him.

Matthew 23:24-43

The Parable of the Weeds

- ²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came

and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

²⁸ "'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹ "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

³¹ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

³³ He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

³⁴ Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

"I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

The Parable of the Weeds Explained

³⁶ Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

³⁷ He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

⁴⁰ "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Sermon: The Kingdom of God is like

It would be great to have your Bibles opened to **Matthew Chapter 13** beginning at verse 24.

Let me **ask God for His wisdom and understanding first...**

Let's pray...

Context/Recap

- Last week – Jesus told a **parable** – one of seven parables in this chapter of Matthew
- As we said last week a **parable** is an *earthly story with a heavenly meaning* – a story that **illustrates a truth about God and about His Kingdom**
- So, we'd better **define a Kingdom** – a **Kingdom is: a country, state, or territory ruled by a king or queen.**
- So, from that we **can deduce** – there **has to be King** (that's King Jesus) – and there has to be a territory – which is both **Heaven and Earth**
- And we can also say that a **Kingdom has citizens** – people whom the King rules over
- But the Kingdom is more than a physical Kingdom – it's a **spiritual Kingdom**

- More narrowly, the kingdom of Heaven is ***a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who are willingly submit to God's authority.***

[Slide 1 – Parable of Sower]



- In last week's parable of the Sower – Jesus told the **1st parable of the kingdom**
- It was about a **farmer sowing seed in 4 soils/locations**: on a **path** - in a **rocky place** - in **amongst weeds** - and in **good soil**
 - In this parable the **seed** represented the **Word of God**
 - And in the parable only 1 out of the 4 soils/locations was **successful** – the **good soil**
 - We also said last week – that the **4 soils/locations** – represented **people's response** to how the seed - **God's Word** - was sown in them
 - We said– people's response to God's word –**showed** that they are either **spiritually blind & deaf** and so **reject His Word**– or they are **spiritually aware** and **accept His Word**
 - The point of the parable is that - only those - who respond to God's Word and accept Jesus' invitation and spiritually grow - are like the good soil – and **are truly part of the Kingdom of Heaven** – and those who reject Jesus are **not part of His Kingdom** – there's no sitting on the fence!
 - And we finished up last week saying the purpose of the parable – was so that people would hear and understand what Jesus says– and **they join the dots...**

- This 1st parable is **KEY** to the rest of the parables in the chapter

[Slide 2 – Kingdom is like]



- In our reading this morning – Matthew 13:24-43 - Jesus tells **3 more** parables – each one starts with the phrase - *“The Kingdom of God is like...”*
- In these 3 parables
- Jesus tells the disciples **WHAT** the Kingdom of Heaven is like
- And we are meant to see - **WHY** - Jesus says - what He says - about the Kingdom - by listening and understanding His Words and **joining the dots...**
- So, for each parable – we will **look at WHAT** Jesus says – and then WHY He says it.

Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30 & 37-43)

- So, the first parable – the **Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds**

[Slide 3-Wheat and Weeds]



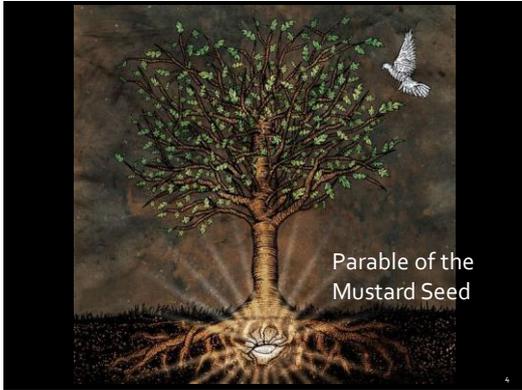
- V24-25 – Jesus gives us the **WHAT** - “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.
- So, what does the parable mean?
- Well - **Jesus explains the parable in vv37-43**
 - The **man sowing** the seed (v24) is **Jesus** (v37)
 - The **field** (v24) is the **world** (v38)
 - The **good seed** – the **wheat** – represents the **ones who have accepted Jesus’ invitation** and **believe in Jesus** and **follow Him** – and they are **part of the Kingdom** (v38)
 - The **weeds** are people who **belong to the evil one** (Satan)
 - The **enemy** who sowed those weeds in with the wheat - is the **evil one** (Satan)
- So, the scary thing we learn is that the Kingdom has both good seed (wheat) and **bad seed** (weeds) in it!
- In the old **KJV** of the Bible the **word used** for **weeds** is tares
- And the **Greek word** for **tares** [zizanion] – describes **rye grass** (called **darnel**) that resembles wheat, except the **grains are black**. The **problem** is until the tares (darnel) grow tall – they look exactly like wheat – and they are also poisonous!
- What Jesus is illustrating– is it’s hard to tell which is the wheat and which is the weeds (tares).
- So, if we pull out the weeds, we may pull out the wheat as well – **so Jesus says** – **don’t pull out the weeds** – leave them growing side by side with the weeds – and **wait until harvest**
- I have this same problem in my garden – much to Heather’s great horror – I can’t tell the difference **between - onion weed, freesias and jonquils**

- But **WHY** is Jesus telling us this about the Kingdom?
- Here's the **WHY** - **Not everyone in the Kingdom of Heaven is fair-dinkum** [REPEAT] – **there are good seeds and bad seeds** – there are both wheat and weeds (tares) in Jesus' church
- Who are the **weeds**?
 - The weeds are **those who may seem like genuine Christians** – even profess they are – **but like the tares** – they are **poisonous** and they **cause divisions** and **disunity in the church** – they have their own agenda – and not Jesus' agenda – but **they may do it in such a subtle way sometimes** so that we can't quite put our finger on what the problem is
- Jesus says – **we - can't** tell the difference sometimes between those who are fair dinkum and those who are not – **only God can do that.**
- So, **we have to trust Him to pull up the weeds**
- And Jesus promises that at the harvest – on **the day of reckoning** – **He will send His angels** – to harvest the wheat and the weeds – and **the weeds will be bundled up and thrown in a furnace** – and that is a picture of hell
- This day of reckoning is not a maybe – **it's guaranteed!**
- Ultimately those who are not fair dinkum will be **judged by Jesus**
- In the meantime – we can call out behaviour that is contrary to God's Word (Matthew 7) – but we can't necessarily be sure who is and who isn't a Christian
- And so, **we have to be on our guard** There may be weeds who sabotage the church!
- As 1 Peter 5:8 says - *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*
- The main point of this parable is - **Not everyone in the Kingdom of Heaven is fair-dinkum**

Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)

- Which bring us to the second parable – **The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

[Slide 4-Mustard Seed]



- V31-32 – Jesus gives us the **WHAT** - “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”
- Jesus doesn’t explain this parable for us
- But we know that a **mustard seed is the smallest of seeds** and in the parable, it **grows into a large plant** and even becomes a tree
- We are meant to see this growth is surprising – perhaps even abnormally larger than one would expect
- But **WHY** is Jesus telling us this about the Kingdom?
- Here’s the **WHY?**
- **The growth of the Kingdom is surprising and sometimes misleading [REPEAT]** – the **mustard plant/tree grew bigger than was expected** from such humble beginnings. The tree represents Jesus’ Kingdom – and on Earth - that is His Church which also grew from humble beginnings – from 12 mainly uneducated apostles – and the early church became huge – and spread across countries and continents. Now 2000 years later – there are currently 2.5 billion Christians in the world

- Over those centuries – **Christians** have been **persecuted, martyred**, people have tried to get rid of the Bible, there have been **all sorts of attacks and restrictions on Christians** – but they have all failed to stop the **Christian church growing**. **That's because nothing can stop God's purposes for His Word** (see Isaiah 55)
- However, in the parable, there may be a hint of trouble – **not everyone agrees with this interpretation I might add**
- But in the tree in the parable - **there are birds** – and there were **birds in the 1st parable of the Sower** - from last week – **the birds were sent by the evil one** (v4 & v19) to take the seed (God's word) away – so the birds were baddies
- So, the point is as Jesus' Kingdom grows like a tree from that mustard seed – birds might come a nestle in the tree of the Kingdom for refuge and safety – but these birds might not necessarily all be good birds – **some birds may peck away at Jesus' church** - **there may be "birds" who cause trouble**
- The reason I suggest that the birds might be trouble – is because this lines up with the 1st parable that not all soils/locations were good and successful – and it also lines up with the 2nd parable – **where there was trouble with weeds** – and it also lines up with the next parable we will look at about yeast too!
- What we can **conclude from** this **parable of the mustard seed** is:
 - The Kingdom starts off small and **grows big**
 - We **need to be patient** as the Kingdom grows
 - The tree representing the Kingdom **offers refuge and safety to all**
 - But **some "birds"** may come and nestle in the tree with us – **who might peck away at God's Truth and cause trouble**
 - Also – growing big is not always a good thing - **growth might become a problem** – **as more people join** – they may bring their own agendas and self-centredness – rather than being Christ centred...

As the early Christian church grew – false teaching crept in—and the church of Rome taught the people to follow the church and not necessarily to follow Jesus and His Word

This brought about the Protestant Reformation in 1517 – and **from that the kingdom divided into various denominations**

These **denominations didn't always agree with each other either** – so more denominations evolved

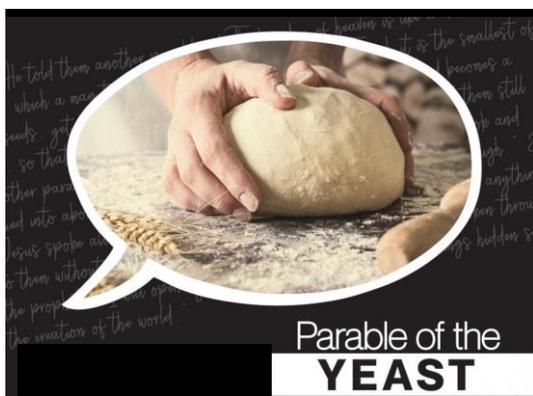
Some denominations also had false teaching - **all because there are weeds in there and some birds pecking away at the Kingdom tree**

- Also – **we need to remember - WE - CAN'T grow the church – only God and His Word can do that** – we are His instruments
- When we start thinking we are growing the church on our own – **then we're in trouble!**
- And so, the point of the parable of the mustard seed is - **the growth of the Kingdom is surprising and sometimes misleading**

Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:33)

- Which brings us to the **third parable** – **The Parable of the Yeast**

[Slide 5-Yeast]



- V33 – Jesus gives us the **WHAT** - **The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”**
- This very short parable mentions yeast
- What is yeast?
- Yeast (or leaven) is: *a baking agent, which converts the fermentable sugars present in dough into the gas, carbon dioxide. This causes the dough to expand or rise as gas forms pockets or bubbles.*
- This very short parable of yeast (leaven) could be seen as **another example of growth**. A tiny bit of yeast (leaven) **permeates a whole batch –in the same way God’s word starts off small and grows and influences a great “batch” of people.** That is certainly true.
- But again, in context, we have had in the earlier parables - weeds (tares) corrupting the Kingdom; and the abnormal growth of the Kingdom and birds perhaps causing trouble, we have here God’s Kingdom being threatened by the threat of corruption and impurity (represented by the yeast/leaven).
- In several Bible passages, we see yeast (leaven) used in a **negative sense**:
 - At the time of Passover - the **Israelites ate bread without yeast** – as they were escaping Egypt in a hurry – and didn’t have time to make bread properly. And in time - **yeast became a symbol of impurity** (Exodus 12:8, 15-10)
 - At various Jewish feasts – bread without yeast was eaten as a symbol of purity (Exodus 13:7; 34:25). So, **yeast was, again, seen as a symbol of impurity or corruption.**
 - Jesus Himself warns against the yeast of the Pharisees – which He says is their hypocrisy and false teaching (Luke 12:1; Matthew 16:6-12; 22:16-21)

- And the Apostle Paul also warns the church in Galatia about **a little yeast of impurity in the church damaging the whole church** (Galatians 5:9)
- Again, opinion is divided as to whether the yeast/leaven Jesus is referring to is a positive or negative influence
- Jesus' listeners would have been a bit surprised to hear Jesus use yeast (leaven) as an image of the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet when we think about it, that is just what Jesus' followers must have seemed like to any respectable Jew; they would have seemed like yeast (leaven). Jesus' followers included: the **common, the uneducated, women, tax collectors, the sick, the disabled, and disreputable characters** – this would have seemed quite distasteful to the respectable Jew.
- But God is like that. He takes distasteful characters (the yeast/leaven) and transforms them and then transforms society through them. God's Kingdom might seem initially to be unimpressive (full of tax collectors and sinners) **but it grows into something amazing.**
- But there is a stronger point here: God's Kingdom through His Word is bound to penetrate and transform the evil environment in which it is sown - just as effectively as yeast penetrates and transforms the flour into which it is put. To be sure, the powers of evil (the yeast/leaven) will do all they can to resist and corrupt the Kingdom, but their efforts will ultimately be seen to have no purpose. Until the consummation of the Kingdom, when Jesus returns, there will always be found alongside the bona fide children of the kingdom those who do not belong to it.
- But **WHY** is Jesus telling us this about the Kingdom?
- Here's the **WHY?**
- **There will be both positive and negative influences in the Kingdom of Heaven**
[REPEAT]
- The point of the parable is: the influence a small amount of hidden good can make.

- God can use a small amount to achieve great things.
 - For e.g., a small number of **“hidden” Christians in China** have grown God’s Kingdom exponentially!
 - For e.g. - a small number of people working for the **Open Doors organisation** – have **smuggled thousands and thousands of Bibles secretly into predominantly non-Christian countries**
 - For e.g. - the **Holy Spirit** dwelling and working in people can’t be seen – The **Holy Spirit is hidden but can grow people and communities.**
 - For e.g. - our **“little bit of leaven”** in **showing love and care** can permeate the whole batch of our church family! One- or two-people’s loving care can affect the whole church family – can’t it?

- At the same time the parable is also saying - a small amount of **hidden bad** can **influence in a bad way too** and **corrupt a church.**

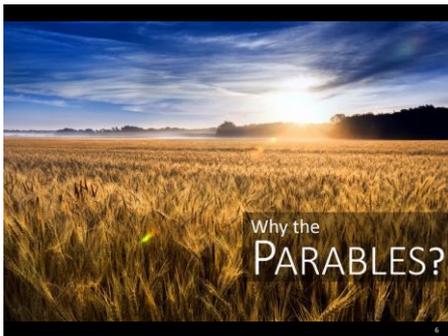
- This may be false teaching:
 - Like - **all people will be saved for Heaven,**
 - Like - **all religions lead to Heaven** – Christians and Muslims worship the same God,
 - Like - **prosperity gospel** – which teaches if Christians are sick, suffering, poor or unsuccessful it’s because of their sin or lack of faith,
 - Like - we can **rely on our own ideas of holiness and our own efforts** - instead of submitting to Jesus and encouraging people to imitate Him
 - Like - **Hyper grace** – which teaches that all sin - past, present, and future - has already been forgiven, so there is **no need for a believer to ever confess their sins and repent!**

So, the point of the **Parable** of the **Yeast** is - **There will be both positive and negative influences in the Kingdom of Heaven**

Why Parables? (Matthew 13:34-35) and Psalm 78:1-8

- So why does Jesus use parables?

[Slide 6 – Parables]



- As well as the reasons we gave last week; that Jesus wanted his listeners to really listen and understand and join the dots; Jesus tells us in v35 that He also told parables to fulfil a prophecy from our OT reading from Psalm 78
- Psalm 78 shows God speaking in parables – saying that the parables speak about old things the ancestors of Israel were told of – but these things will now be told and explained to the next generation. So that the new generations' hearts will not be stubborn and rebellious like the previous generations were.
- Isn't that what Jesus' teaching in parables is really all about, to transform closed hard hearts - into open soft hearts – hearts that have a disposition towards Jesus?

Our Response

How will we respond then – to these 3 parables this morning?

[Slide 7a-Response 1]

1. Parables teach us that - we have to **move** from “**what God/Jesus says**” and move to “**why God/Jesus says it** – we have to move from baby milk to solid food – because **God wants us to grow more like Jesus** – through His Spirit and through His Word

[Slide 7b-Response 2]

2. We need to be aware of false Christians (the weeds), **false growth** (the deceptively big tree and the birds) and **false doctrine** (the yeast). **We must pray for discernment.** And to combat these problems: we must go back to last week and remember “the best book to read is the Bible” – are we checking that what people say lines up with the Bible?

[Slide 7c-Response 3]

3. If we are fair-dinkum citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven – then **v43 says we are righteous because of** Jesus – and we will shine like the sun. **So, let’s ask God how we can shine for Jesus in other people’s lives!**

Let’s pray...

Father God, thank you for your word which grows your kingdom.

Help us to be aware of false Christians, of false growth and of false teaching.

Help us through your Spirit and through your Word - to be fair dinkum citizens of your kingdom – help us to be people who shine Jesus’ light into people’s lives, in this dark and fallen world.

In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.