

(Matthew) ch.13:14-43

by Zac Poonen

Jesus spoke in parables to reveal truth to those who are spiritually minded, while hiding it from those who do not have a desire to obey God.

Duration: 54:26

Scripture: Matthew 13:3-33, Matthew 13:43

Topics: "Biblical Discernment", "Parable Interpretation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of discerning the intentions of those who come to ask us questions about God's word. If someone comes with a genuine desire to obey and learn, we should take the time to explain the truths of the Bible to them. The speaker then goes on to explain the parable of the sower, highlighting that there are actually six types of ground, three bad and three good. The first bad ground is like a roadside where the seed cannot penetrate and is devoured by birds. The second bad ground is like rocky soil where the seed initially sprouts but lacks depth and quickly withers.

Transcript

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel and Chapter 13. We were considering in our last study the reason why Jesus spoke in parables and he said amazingly enough that this was in order that other people who did not have a desire to obey would not understand. One would think that a good teacher is one who can make everyone understand.

That's alright when we are teaching earthly subjects like geography or physics or chemistry or maths. But when it comes to the scripture, God speaks in such a way that it is those who want to obey him who understand the truth spiritually. And others who merely receive the truth in their minds do not understand spiritually even though they understand intellectually.

This is the meaning of the prophecy of Isaiah that Jesus quoted in Matthew 13, verse 14 and 15. And it's significant that this quotation is from Isaiah 6 and verse 9. And you know Isaiah 6 is the great chapter where Isaiah has a vision of the Lord. And he sees the Lord high and lifted up and he gets a revelation of himself.

What he gets in Isaiah 6 is not an understanding of truth, remember? But he got an insight into the sin in his own life. In fact when he saw the Lord, he did not understand some new doctrine but he said, Woe is me for I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips. Isaiah was a God-fearing man.

The secrets of the Lord are with those who fear him. And so God gave him a revelation concerning his own condition. And when he acknowledged it and was willing to turn from it, we read in Isaiah 6 that the seraphim flew to him with a burning coal and cleansed his iniquity.

His sin was forgiven. Isaiah 6, verse 7. And then he heard the voice of the Lord saying, Who will go for us? Whom shall I send? And Isaiah was ready to go. He was a cleansed servant.

And what was the message? We read in Isaiah 6, 9. Go and tell this people you will keep on listening but you don't perceive. You keep on looking but you don't understand. The hearts of this people have become heavy, their ears are dull.

Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts. So that's the verse that Jesus quoted. And there it was in Isaiah 6, a contrast between the revelation of the spirit that Isaiah got and the intellectual understanding that other people got.

Without spiritual revelation. So that's the point here. That God's word is being written in such a way that only spiritually minded people will understand it.

Even if they are pretty dull intellectually. It's got nothing to do with our mind. It's got everything to do with our heart.

And our spirit. A part of which is our conscience. If you have a good conscience, you can understand the word of God much better than another person who's clever, who's got a bad conscience.

Because God speaks his word in such a way as to deliberately hide the truth from those who have no desire for a godly life. And this is why you find so many people arguing about scripture. Verses of scripture, so many people have different interpretations.

And it's always in the realm of the intellect. It's like two blind people trying to argue about the color of a painting. It's hilarious if you were watching it, because neither of them can see.

And when people try to argue about scripture on the intellectual level, it's exactly the same. It's two blind people arguing about the color of a painting. Or two deaf people trying to argue about the pitch of a particular piece of music.

It's ridiculous, but that is exactly how it is. Spiritual truths are spiritually discerned. The word of God says the natural man cannot understand the things of the spirit of God, and they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned.

And so we see that it's very, very important when we come to the word of God that we examine the condition of our heart much more than see whether our mind can grasp truth. Because we shall go astray that way. So that's a very important thing that we learn in these verses in Matthew chapter 13.

And then Jesus went on to say in verse 17, Truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desire to see what you see. What were the disciples seeing which the Old Testament prophets and righteous men desired to see? You remember when Simeon picked up the baby Jesus in the temple, he said, Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen your salvation. The Messiah, the coming of the kingdom of God in power.

The disciples were beginning to see the start of that, the beginning of that. Many Old Testament prophets had desired to see it, but they didn't see it. We are the most privileged people that have ever lived on the face of the earth.

We have the opportunity to know the kingdom of God, the greatest truth that God has ever revealed to human beings. But we need to be spiritually minded if we are to understand, otherwise we'll miss the bus completely. And now Jesus explains the parable of the sower to his disciples who asked him.

Because we read that the disciples came to him privately and asked him this, and he explained to them which he did not explain to the multitude. The multitude would not understand. There are many times when the Pharisees came to Jesus with questions, and he did not always give them a reply.

Sometimes he would ask them another question, and put them off completely. But when the disciples asked questions, he always answered them. That's a principle for us to follow.

That when people come to ask us things, we need to discern, are they asking merely for argument's sake? Then of course, we don't waste our time replying. But if they come with a sincere heart like the disciples, because they want to obey, then we can take pains to explain the truths of God's word. And then Jesus explains the parable of the sower.

Verse 19, he says, when anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, notice he is explaining the first bad ground. It's commonly accepted that there are four types of grounds, three bad and one good. But if we look carefully, we'll find there are six types of ground, three bad and three good.

The first bad ground, we read in verse four, was the roadside, where the birds came and devoured the seed. The seed could not penetrate the hard roadside, and so could not grow up. The second bad ground was the rocky place, which just had superficial soil on it, and so the seed went in, but there was not much depth of soil, and so when the sun rose, it withered away.

The third bad ground was that which fell among thorns. It grew up, but it was choked by the thorns that were growing up all around it. And then, in verse eight, we read about the three types of good ground.

The first type of good ground was that which produced thirtyfold, the second type of good ground was that which produced sixtyfold, and the third type of good ground was that which produced one hundredfold. They were all good ground, they were all disciples, and yet the result in their lives was so completely different from each other. One produced only thirty percent with the same seed of what another disciple produced, and this is so true to life.

We find three brothers who were converted on the same day many years ago, and you look at their lives today, and all three are different. One has developed so much spiritually, pressed on. Another, a little less.

Another, still less. What is the reason? There have been different degrees of wholeheartedness. That's the reason.

So we need to look at this parable at three types of bad ground and three types of good ground. Jesus explains the first bad ground is that which, when it hears the word of the kingdom, it does not understand it. It does not understand it because it's got no interest in obedience.

And the birds of the air, symbolic of evil spirits that are always there in every meeting, do you know that whenever you read God's word, there are evil spirits around, not to harass you, but just to make sure that your mind is taken away from the subject that God is speaking about. You can sit in a meeting and your thoughts begin to wander. Have you ever considered that these evil spirits will make your thoughts wander so that you don't take heed to God's word? You sit down to read the Bible and your thoughts begin to wander.

These are the birds of the air trying to take away the seed, so that nothing is sown. And here's where we have to fight a battle. So that we say, Lord, I want to hear what you're saying to me.

All the time we must be alert in the midst of all our other work. We must be alert to hear what God is saying throughout the day. And when God has spoken to us, we have to be very careful that we don't come into the category of those from whom the birds of the air have taken away the seed.

There are so many distractions that the devil brings. In a meeting, when we're studying God's word, when we're reading a good Christian book that will challenge us to godliness, the birds of the air come whispering all types of things. He could even tell you this is a wrong doctrine when you hear the truth, so that you don't take heed to the truth.

But if you've got a heart that's willing to obey, then you will understand that the birds of the air will not be able to take away the seed. It will sink down, and if it is good ground, it will produce fruit. Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13, verse 18.

Jesus says, hear then the parable of the sower. Here he was explaining the meaning of the parable of the sower to his disciples. When they asked him, they would never have understood if they had not asked.

They were interested, and when God sees that we are interested in knowing the real meaning of His word and come to Him with inquiry, then He explains to us the truths of His word. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, verse 19, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road, and the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places.

This is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. Here's the second type of bad ground. This is better than the first one.

The first one was distracted and couldn't receive the word. As soon as it fell, the birds of the air took it off. But the second one was a little better.

He received the word, but underneath was rock, and on top was a few inches of soil. This is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. That superficial soil is so soft that the seed goes right in.

But underneath is rock, and he has no firm root in himself. There's no place for it to take root because there's rock underneath. And therefore, whatever root there is, is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

Now there is a warning for us. It speaks about receiving the word in a superficial way. In other words, seeking to keep those commandments externally.

Not inwardly, but only externally. In other words, in the eyes of men, we have a good testimony. We don't go to the movies, we don't drink or gamble, and externally our life is good.

It speaks of a superficial life, but if you were to dig through the soil, just maybe three or four inches, you hit rock. A hard heart that is impure, that's filled with dirty thoughts, and many other things that man cannot see. Here Jesus is speaking about those who receive the word in such a way as to cleanse their external life, but do nothing about breaking up the hardness of their heart caused by sin in their thought life, in their attitudes, in their motives.

These are the people who are quite happy with having a good testimony before other men in the church, but are not concerned about purity of heart before God. And it's a sad thing to say that the vast majority of believers fall into this category. They are more concerned that their testimony before men is pure than that their testimony before God is pure.

They would be far more grieved if their external testimony was lost than their inward testimony before God. If men caught them in adultery, that would grieve them tremendously, but the fact that they commit adultery in their minds does not disturb them. These are the ones that are sown on rock with a superficial layer of soil that receives the seed, and something comes forth.

But let some trial come, temptation. Inwardly they fall, that fall is not obvious. Finally, they fall away completely.

When the sun is risen in its strength, when Jesus returns, Jesus is called the son of righteousness, they wither away. Some fall away even before. If persecution comes because of the word, they are not willing to face it because they have sought for a Christianity that would give them a comfortable life.

They didn't want to seek affliction and persecution. They would rather hear a message which tells them that the gospel will make you rich, the gospel will save you from all your problems. But let affliction or persecution come, and they fall away because they looked for a soft gospel that made their earthly life comfortable, and that is a false gospel.

Jesus said in the world you shall have tribulation, not wealth. It's in the Old Testament that they were promised wealth. In the New Testament we are promised tribulation.

It's a fundamental difference. So if you are a follower of Moses, by all means seek for wealth. But if you are a follower of Jesus, look for tribulation.

What you are looking for depends on who you are following. The followers of Moses will look for prosperity. The followers of Jesus look for persecution because they stand for the truth.

And these are the ones who have root. Then the third type of bad soil that Jesus spoke about is the seed, verse 22, that was sown among the thorns. This again is good seed.

And here is a person who really wants to have an inner life as well. It's not just superficially that he accepts the word. But after a while, when the seed begins to grow up, it says the worry of the world, or the cares of the world, the desires for not sinful things, but legitimate earthly things, come and choke the word.

For example, a man can be so interested in worldly music that that can be like a thorn. It's not that there is anything sinful necessarily in that type of music. There is a lot of worldly music which is very sinful, which

is contact with evil spirits, particularly rock music.

That gets you in touch with evil spirits. But there is other types of classical music and various other types of music which are not necessarily sinful, but which can be like thorns if a person is excessively interested in them. Games, for example.

A person can be so crazy after some sport or some game that it can choke out his Christian life. A person can be so crazy after even Christian choir practice. There are people who practice singing in the choir for hours and don't have five minutes to read the Bible or pray.

We can be sure that the thorns have choked out the word. Sure. What are you singing in the choir if you don't have time to read the word of God and pray? No.

There are many, many things like this which don't look sinful, but which are legitimate, which are like thorns that choke the seed. It could be worries and cares concerning the future, the future of your children, financial worries, you can't trust God. And these cares and worries, not sin, cares and worries, which are sin in a sense because Jesus said do not be anxious.

It's unbelief. These things choke out the word so that there is no development in that person's life. It could also be the deceitfulness of riches.

Jesus said two things about money. One he said was dirty and the other he said was deceitful. He called mammon the mammon of unrighteousness.

In Luke chapter 16 we read that. He said if you have not been faithful in the mammon of unrighteousness, or unrighteous mammon, Luke 16.11. That's what he said about money. It's dirty.

The other thing he said about money was it's deceitful. Matthew 13.22. Yet we cannot live on earth without money. All of us need it in order to live.

We have to earn a living. We have to buy things almost every day. We have to pay rent.

We have to buy our food, clothing, education for our children, so many things. It's unavoidable. Jesus himself had to handle money.

In fact the reason why they had a treasurer was because they needed money to live, those disciples. But Jesus was never corrupted by money. It's one thing to use money.

It's another thing to love it and to be deceived by it and to cling on to it. When we cling on to it, it soils us. And we are deceived by it.

What are the deceitfulness of riches spoken of here? The deceitfulness of riches is that a person can think that if he has money he'll be happy. That's a deception. Some of the wealthiest people in the world are the most unhappy people in the world.

And some of the poorest people in the world are the people who are the happiest. So riches certainly don't mean money. It's a deception.

And yet many people think that if you have many things, the abundance of things, they can enjoy life. And Jesus said a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things which he possesses. So if a person

has not cleansed himself from these things, he can be deceived.

And that deception comes through wealth or the eagerness to acquire wealth. And then he begins to do certain things which are not absolutely righteous. And gradually loses out spiritually.

He started off well, but the thorns grew up and choked the life out of that seed. There are many, many cases like this of believers who started out very, very well. They were so zealous and so sincere.

On the day they were born again, they really repented. And we can say that the devil saw them as wholehearted disciples who were going to be a threat to Satan's kingdom. And a power in the kingdom of God.

And he decided to corrupt them. He couldn't corrupt them with sin. So he corrupted them by getting them occupied with a whole lot of legitimate things which were not helpful for their spiritual growth.

He got them occupied in the pursuit of money. Perhaps not in cheating and telling lies, but in the pursuit and the love of money. There are many thorns that can choke the seed.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13. In our last study, we were considering the different types of bad ground.

The first one was where the birds of the air took away the seed before it had a chance even to go underground. People who hear the word and the devil has taken it away before it does any work in them. The second category was the seed that fell on the rocky ground.

A superficial life. Immediately they respond. They are quick to say hallelujah and raise their hands and get excited about the word of God.

But there is no depth in their life. Their life is very shallow. There is no hidden life.

And the third category are those who take it seriously, but as they go along, they get taken up with all types of worldly interests. Not sinful things, but a whole lot of worldly cares and worries get taken up. Not with cheating other people, but they are deceived by money.

They pursue money and they are interested in a lot of worldly things and desires. And thus the world comes and chokes the seed out. We can look around and see many believers who have fallen a prey to these things.

And then finally Jesus spoke about the good ground. The good ground are those who hear the word, verse 23, and understand it. They understand because they have a desire to obey.

They are careful to see that the word is not superficial, that the birds of the air don't take it away. They are careful to ensure that it doesn't just stay on the surface, but goes down, sinks deep and produces fruit that will remain. They are also careful to ensure that in the time to come, the thorns of the world don't come and choke the word from producing fruit.

And yet, and yet, in spite of all these things, we still find there is a difference. There is thirtyfold, there is sixtyfold and there is a hundredfold. And we can ask, why is that? That shows us that it's possible to take a word of God.

And it's a question of how wholehearted you are in desiring to obey the spirit of that word that determines how much you are going to grow. For example, we can say a person who does not allow the birds of the air to take away the seed and make sure that the word sinks deep into his heart as well and does not allow worldliness of any form to affect his life, is a good brother. He's got a good heart.

But his testimony is only negative. His testimony is, I don't love money. I don't lust after women in my heart.

I don't lose my temper. I don't do this, I don't do that and I don't do the other thing. I don't commit that sin, I don't commit that sin.

It's just a whole lot of negative things. What did he do positively? Did he live for the kingdom of God? Did he give up everything in order that he might live for God's kingdom? Not necessarily. And yet he's got a good heart.

He didn't allow the thorns to come. He didn't only have a superficial life, he had a good inner life too. He had a clean thought life.

It's possible to have a clean thought life. It's possible to be free from the love of money. And yet, not to be wholehearted in seeking the kingdom of God first.

And putting God's interests first. We can still seek our own a little bit along the way. And then there's another brother who really forsook everything.

Who really put God's kingdom above all his own interests. God was first in his life from morning to night, every day. In everything he thought of God's interests and not his own.

Everything he sought to do for the glory of God. And cleansed himself in the small things and the little things. Learned to live a life of total obedience.

Not just to the letter of the new commandment, the new covenant. But to the spirit of it. And thus he became a hundredfold brother.

The Bible says that in eternity we're all going to be different. Even among believers. That's very clear in 1 Corinthians 15.

It says as one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. And that's interesting.

That 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 41 and 42. There's a different glory of the stars and of the sun and the moon. And so also is the resurrection of the dead.

And so we see that it is going to be different in eternity. Because there were different degrees of faithfulness here on this earth. So we have only one life.

And the person who realizes that the things that are unseen are eternal. And the things that are seen are temporal. Will be wholehearted in seeking to be one of those hundredfold brothers.

Not a thirtyfold brother. But a hundredfold brother. One who is willing to pay the price.

So that he has no regret in eternity. That he lived his life completely for God. Completely for God's kingdom.

And wholeheartedly spent himself. Anyone who has given themselves completely to Jesus. For the Lord's sake and the gospel's sake.

Will reap a hundredfold in this life. And in the life to come. That's what Jesus himself said.

In Matthew 19. A hundredfold. He said.

For all. Many times as much. As he has given up.

But some have not given up everything. They have given up only 30%. They get 30%.

Some give up 60%. They get 60%. Because God is very righteous.

What you reap. What you sow, you reap. As you give, it will be given back to you.

But in eternity we shall discover. That the wisest people were those who gave everything up to the Lord. And said, Lord, your kingdom and your interests are going to be primary in my life.

And dear friends, it's possible to start like that. And end up as a thirtyfold brother. Or perhaps like one of those.

Whose seed is choked by the thorns. So there's a great need for us to preserve ourselves in that initial devotion to the Lord. And then Jesus went on from there to speak another parable.

He said in verse 24 of Matthew 13. The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. Now this also is a parable about sowing good seed.

But in this case the seed is not the word of God. In this case the seed are the children of the kingdom themselves. The kingdom of heaven, he said, may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But when men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went away. And when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares also became evident. The slaves of the landowner said to him, sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? How then have these tares come up? And he said, an enemy has done this.

The slaves said, shall we gather up these tares? And he said, no, because you may not be able to distinguish between the tares and the wheat. And you may accidentally pull out some of the wheat as well. No, wait till harvest time.

By the time of harvest you'll be able to distinguish clearly. Then we'll pull out the tares. And Jesus explained this kingdom, this parable later on.

In verse 36, the disciples again came and said, explain to us the parable of the tares in the field. And he said, the one who sows the good seed is the son of man. Jesus is sowing the seed, the field of the world.

And in the world he has sowed good seed, which are the sons of the kingdom. And the tares are the sons of the evil one. The thing is, the enemy, who is the devil, sows his children in the midst of God's children.

That is the meaning of this parable. That in every church you'll find some hypocrites. In some you'll find many.

In others you'll find less. But the devil who put a Judas Iscariot into the midst of that first church that Jesus established of twelve people, will put some in every single church. What shall we do? Are we able to distinguish? Sometimes they look so much like the wheat, the tares.

They've got the right language. They sing the songs well. They appear to be earnest.

But God, who sees the heart, sees a fundamental difference. We're not here to throw anybody out of the church. Jesus said, him that cometh to me I'll never cast out.

So we're not here to cast anybody out, unless they live in obvious sin. According to 1 Corinthians 5, when they need to be excommunicated. But otherwise, there are hypocrites who will stay in every church.

And the Lord says, let them stay. In the day of judgment, he will send his angels, we read, in verse 39. And the hypocrites will be gathered up first, and burnt with fire.

All stumbling blocks, verse 41. And all those who commit sin. These are not worldly people.

Worldly people are not in the midst of God's people. No. These are people who pretend to be wheat.

This doesn't mean that we encourage hypocrisy. In a church, the fire of God's word must be so strong that a hypocrite feels uncomfortable. So uncomfortable that either he repents or gets offended and leaves.

For remember, the field that Jesus spoke of here is not the church. The field is the world, Jesus said. It is in the world.

And it's when the world is allowed to come into a church. We can say the church becomes worldly, and then it becomes easy for tares to grow up there. So how shall we keep the church pure? Not by sorting out wheat and tares, but by making sure that the world doesn't come into the church.

That the field called the world is not found in the church. Then we can purify the church. That is by proclaiming God's word as a fire to keep the church pure.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 13. We were considering in our last study. The man who sowed the good seed, the parable that Jesus spoke.

In the field where the seed was not God's word, but the children of the kingdom. As this is Matthew 13, 24. He first spoke about God's word as the seed, and then he spoke about the children of God as the seed.

That's very interesting. That Jesus spoke two parables. Many people are familiar with the first one, but not the second one.

But when you see how Jesus spoke one after the other. We see that the children of the kingdom are also called the seed. And God's word is called the seed.

What is the significance of this? God's word is the written word which is sown into our hearts. When we obey that, and it becomes a part of our life. We can say in a sense that word has been reproduced in our life.

And we ourselves become the seed as well. God seeds the world with his kingdom. With the sons of his kingdom.

And they are the ones who have allowed that seed of God's word which is spoken in the first parable. To become their life through obedience. These are the wheat.

The others are the tares. Who speak the right language, say the right words. But God's word has not become life.

The word has not become flesh in them. It is just a written commandment. We are to be among those in whom the word has become life.

Then Jesus spoke another parable. Again about seed. He said the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.

Which a man took and sowed in his field. And this is smaller than all other seeds. But when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants.

It becomes a tree. So that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. This and the remaining parables are not explained by Jesus.

And therefore it becomes a little more difficult for us to be dogmatic about its interpretation. Particularly these two parables. This one about the mustard seed.

And the next one about leaven. When we understand that Jesus was speaking about the kingdom of heaven as it appeared on the earth. He said the kingdom of heaven is like a sower going out to sow.

He said the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. And an enemy came and sowed tares. So in that outward expression of the kingdom of heaven we find wheat and tares.

So he is speaking about what people see to be the church here on earth. He is not talking about the pure church as it will be in heaven. Because in that church there are no tares.

In that church there is no one with bad ground. Who has only a superficial life or in whom the thorns choke the seed. So we must bear this in mind.

Even the remaining parables. He speaks about the kingdom of heaven having like a dragnet. That is a very clear example in Matthew 13.47. The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet.

And if the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet, who all are the ones inside this dragnet? Good fish and bad fish we read in verse 48. Good fish and bad fish in the kingdom of heaven. In the outward expression of that kingdom in what is commonly known as the church.

And in Christendom on earth. There is both. So once we understand that in all these parables Jesus is not speaking about the kingdom of heaven as it will be in its purity.

In the final day. But rather he is speaking about the kingdom of heaven as it is seen now on earth by others. It looks like a dragnet having good and bad fish.

But it will only be at the end of the age we read in Matthew 13.49 that the wicked will be separated. Until then this kingdom of heaven dragnet contains both. And that is the unfortunate thing.

But God has allowed it. God has allowed hypocrites to be in the church. So that many purposes are fulfilled.

We don't have time to go into all of that now. But when we understand that he is referring to this outward expression of God's kingdom. We understand this parable a little better.

The mustard plant is certainly not the largest of all the plants on earth. Under no category can we call it the largest of plants. But yet we read here about this mustard seed in Matthew 13.31 and 32.

Which when it is full grown becomes larger than all the plants. And becomes a tree. So big that the birds of the air can come and make its nest in the branches of this mustard seed tree.

That is quite amazing. That speaks of a huge tree. Which is not what a mustard tree really becomes.

So we can say that this is referring to an unnatural growth which God never intended. God intended a mustard tree to be a certain size. That is the way God made it in nature.

But here it is speaking about something that has grown far far bigger than God ever intended it to be. And that refers to Christendom in its outward expression. Because of a compromising message.

Gathering together a mixed multitude. Because the narrow gate was not proclaimed. The needle's eye was not held up to every person who wanted to become a Christian.

A whole lot of people were allowed to come in who had no interest in discipleship. Remember the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said, Jesus said you can't follow me unless you give up your love for money. That is essentially what Jesus said.

But you hardly hear that type of preaching today. That needle's eye is not held up. The result is a whole lot of rich young rulers and many other people come into what is called the church today.

And the result is the church, instead of being small and powerful, has become fat and flabby and large in size and lost all its power. It has become the largest of the plants. People say that Christianity is the largest religion in the world today.

What is the use of that if it has lost its power? Ten people who are wholehearted could accomplish more for God on earth than all this great multitude, the early apostles. They were not large in number, but they were pure and therefore powerful. No, the mustard seed was meant by God to grow up to be a small mustard tree.

But man is never satisfied with something small. He wants something big, something that will impress. He wants to build a large denomination that will impress.

And what is the result when we build a huge thing and call it the church? We read here the birds of the air. We read earlier about the birds of the air in the previous parable, in an earlier parable where Jesus said the birds of the air were the agents of Satan. And it says the agents of Satan come and sit down in the branches of this so-called church.

And that's exactly what we see in Christendom today, where people have tried to make it something big and impressive before men. The agents of Satan have come in and sit as board members and elders and deacons. And then, of course, they rule the show.

But that was never the way God intended it. And Jesus was prophesying as to what was going to happen. And there's something that we can profitably ask ourselves.

Which would you prefer? To be in a church that's small and powerful? Or a church that's large and compromising? There is security in numbers as far as the world is concerned. And worldly-minded Christians think that we can impress the nation when we increase in numbers. No, it's not by numbers.

It's by purity. God commits Himself not to a church that's large in number, but that has purity. Jesus never said, By this all men will know you are my disciples when you increase in number and become a great multitude.

No, He was not bothered about numbers. In fact, in the ministry of Jesus, He was always seeking to reduce the multitude. Whenever great multitudes followed Him, He turned around and said some of the hardest things He ever said to them, with the whole purpose of reducing that great multitude to a small number.

It's very rare to see that type of ministry today, that's seeking to reduce the great multitude to a small number that's pure. But that's what God's looking for everywhere. A ministry that will purify the church.

And bring it back to God's original purpose. It can be small, but it'll be a genuine mustard tree that produces mustard seeds. Jesus spoke about, in another place to His disciples, about having faith like a mustard seed.

That was enough. There was no need of a great amount of faith. He said in Luke chapter 17, verse 6, If you have faith like a mustard seed, you can get a tree uprooted, you can get a mountain uprooted.

It's faith, genuine faith, that Jesus likened to a mustard seed. It doesn't have to be big, it has to be genuine. That's the point.

They said, Lord, increase our faith, and the Lord said, you don't need to increase it, you need to get the right quality. Let's remember that. It's quality that God looks for, and not size.

Let's turn now to Matthew's gospel, chapter 13. In our last study, we were considering how Jesus spoke about the kingdom of heaven in this whole chapter in its outward expression. In the way it is known and seen in the world, that which is called Christianity, that which is known as the church.

And he said, in the coming days, this is prophesying about the future, that which is known as the church would unfortunately become far bigger than God ever intended it to be. It would become the largest of all the plants, when God never intended the mustard tree to become the largest. And when it became the largest, because men were interested in size, the birds of the air, the agents of Satan, would come and nest in its branches.

In the book of Revelation, this is Matthew 13 and verse 32. In the book of Revelation, we read about this great structure, where there John sees it as Babylon. And it's very interesting to see the corresponding verse to what Jesus said in Matthew 13, 32, that this has become the largest of the plants, and the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.

And John sees Babylon as a harlot. The harlot church, not the pure church. The harlot church, rich, prosperous, impressive, but corrupt and compromising.

And in Revelation 18, 2, we read that John hears an angel crying out with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great. Notice, in the book of Revelation, Jerusalem, the true church, is called Jerusalem the holy, and Babylon, the false church, is called Babylon the great. There is a difference between greatness and holiness.

Greatness is characteristic of Babylon, holiness is characteristic of Jerusalem. Greatness is characteristic of the false church, purity is characteristic of the true church. Fallen is Babylon the great, and she has become, notice this, a dwelling place of demons.

Imagine, a church becoming the dwelling place of demons. And a prison of every unclean spirit, unclean spirits working in the leaders and in the members of the so-called Christian church. We see it around the world today, preachers falling into immorality.

A prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. Here are the birds sitting in Babylon. So when we compare scripture with scripture, we find that the birds of the air that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 13, 32, are the same birds that settle down in Babylon, corrupting it.

The agents of Satan, who comes as an angel of light, whose ministers have transformed themselves into ministers of righteousness, as we read in 2 Corinthians 11, making the church big and famous and acceptable, instead of pure and powerful and acceptable to God, they make it big and famous and acceptable to men. And in the same context he spoke another parable, Matthew 13, verse 33. He said the kingdom of heaven is like leaven.

Throughout the scripture, leaven is a picture of evil. In the Old Testament, Jesus spoke about that, and we read about it in the book of Exodus. Leaven was never to be found in the house of any true Israelite when they were celebrating the Passover.

In fact, we hear stories about Jewish heads of families searching every nook and corner of their house with little lamps to see that there is no leaven lying in any corner. Leaven was a picture of evil. They were to keep the feast without leaven.

We read in 1 Corinthians 5, let's keep the feast with unleavened bread. It's freedom from evil. Leaven is always a picture of compromise and evil, that which bloats up, just like when you put leaven or yeast into bread.

It no longer remains fat, it no longer remains thin, it bloats up, filled with a lot of air in between and big in size. Without the leaven it would be just ordinary size. It's the same message all over again, repeated.

The kingdom of heaven, he said in his outward expression, will become like leaven. Which a woman, who is this woman? The woman is again Babylon the Great, that you read of in Revelation 17. John saw the false, corrupt, harlot church in Revelation 17 as a woman, clothed in purple and scarlet, Revelation 17.4. A woman who hid this leaven in three packs of meal.

It was a hidden work that the devil did. Hiding it inside this meal, which is the church, until all of it was leaven. Until corruption spread everywhere.

And this is why you find godly men throughout the centuries, whenever they have seen corruption like leaven spread through a whole religious system, have pulled out and started afresh. But unfortunately what's happened? In the new group that was started with the desire for purity, after a generation has gone

by and a new generation comes up, they don't have the same desire for purity as their fathers had, and the same leaven begins to do its work again, and again it spreads all over, it becomes corrupt, till God raises up another set of godly people who want to pull out of this one. And that's been the history of true Christianity through the ages.

This corruption and compromise spreading through a whole system. There are foolish people who think that they can refine the system and purify it. It's not possible.

Corruption, like leaven, once it has spread through the dough, and it has become bloated up bread, you can do nothing about it. You cannot make it unleavened after that. And so we find Jesus spoke very clearly about what was going to come.

And he also said, he who has years to hear, let him hear, in verse 9. Not everybody would have a year to hear. Many would go by reason, and would go astray. Verse 34, all these things, before we move there, we could consider one other aspect about leaven, and that is in relation to our personal life.

We have considered leaven in the whole Christian church, but also in our personal life. We could say that a little bit of compromise, a small sin, can be like leaven that corrupts our whole life. Just one tiny speck of dust in your eye can finally make you blind if you don't wash it off.

If you allow it to be there and constantly irritate you, it can finally make you blind. One little speck of dust. So is leaven.

And we have to be careful that our lives are not affected by this leaven that the devil who comes as an angel of light and as a minister of righteousness tries to cleverly bring into our life to corrupt it. Verse 34, all these things. Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and he was not talking to them without a parable.

When the disciples were alone, he explained to them, but to the multitudes he did not explain. And he said this was so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled. Saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world, Psalm 78 and verse 2. He would open his mouth in parables, and he would utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.

That like we considered in an earlier study, was the things that godly people in older generations wanted to understand but could not understand because they were under the old covenant and the Holy Spirit was not yet given. Now Jesus would come and open his mouth and explain these dark sayings of old. Dark sayings we read in Psalm 78, verse 2. Hidden things which can be revealed to us only by the Holy Spirit.

Then he left the multitudes and went into the house. And his disciples came to him saying, explain to us the parable of the tares of the field. And we considered that explanation when we studied the parable of the tares where he explains in the remaining verses up to verse 43 that the seed is the sons of the kingdom and the tares are the sons of the evil one, verse 38.

And it is very interesting to compare this with how John expresses it in 1 John chapter 3. He also speaks about the sons of God, the children of God and the children of the devil. 1 John 3.10 he says, The children of God and the children of the devil are obvious by this that the one who does not practice righteousness and does not love his brother is a child of the devil. A man who does not know how to practice righteousness and love his brothers is a child of the devil.

That is the mark. The mark of the tares is very clear in 1 John 3.10 that they do not practice righteousness. They say the right words, they use the right language, they sing the right hymns, but they do not practice righteousness in their life.

They do not love their brothers. They have bitterness and grudges and hatred and unforgiving spirit. These are the sons of the evil one.

And the enemy has sowed them in the world. The field is the world. But in the final day the angels will gather up and they will be burnt up.

But then, verse 43, the righteous will then shine forth as the sun. Think of that. The righteous will shine forth as the sun and then Jesus said, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

If you want to be found among the righteous, now is the time to be ready.

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