

Jesus' Kingdom Parables, Part 1

The Kingdom and the Covenant, Session 4

Definitions

- Parable: A saying or story that seeks to drive home a point the speaker wishes to emphasize by illustrating it from a familiar situation of everyday life
- Allegory: A saying or story that conveys hidden, mysterious truths by the use of words which also have a literal meaning
- Metaphor: A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another to imply a comparison
- Simile: A figure of speech in which two essentially unlike things are compared, often introduced by *like* or *as*

Interpreting parables

- Parables use figurative language, so we can't interpret them literally
- If Jesus doesn't interpret his parable for us, we need to identify the question or problem he's addressing
- Kingdom parables are not primarily about the church, should not be interpreted as such
- Consider the general context of Jesus' parables
 - Jews expected "Messiah, son of David," a mighty warrior & king
- Jesus' kingdom parables revealed essential characteristics of an interim kingdom
- Obviously, when interpreting Jesus' parables, it's extremely important to accept his interpretation, if he provides one

Why Jesus used parables

- Mt 13:10, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"
- v 11-15, He used parables to reveal truth to some people yet hide it from others
- v 35, "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world." (Ps 78:2)
- v 14, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." (Isa 6:9)
- v 11, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them."
 - "knowledge" (Gk, v, *ginosko*): to know or have knowledge about someone or something
- What knowledge had they received?
- It seems Jesus initially was the spiritual source of that knowledge, then the Holy Spirit in them would continue teaching them "all things"
- Kingdom insight: Kingdom truths are revealed spiritually, not intellectually

Parable of the sower

- Mt 13:3-9
 - ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ He who has ears, let him hear.”
- Jesus explains this parable is about the kingdom
- People will respond to the message one of four ways
 - v 19, person doesn't understand it & evil one snatches away what he heard
 - v 20-21, person receives the message with joy, but doesn't have any depth of relationship (“root”) so he can't endure trouble or persecution & falls away
 - v 22, person preoccupied with life's worries & deceitfulness of wealth, so the message doesn't benefit him
 - v 23, person understands the message & produces 30 to 100 times what he heard
- Knowledge of kingdom secrets
 - v 11-12, ¹¹ “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”
 - Whoever has what?
- An important word
 - v 19, “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.”
 - v 23, “But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”
 - “understand” (Gk, v, *syniemi*): (1) to bring facts together to gain insight, correlate new facts with older knowledge; (2) to “digest” or ponder new knowledge
- What the person does with the message determines whether it benefits him
- Kingdom insight: People will respond to the kingdom message in a variety of ways; not all of them beneficial

Parable of the weeds

- Mt 13:24-26
 - 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.”
- v 28, the man’s servants asked if they should pull the weeds up
- v 29-30, ²⁹ “No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up 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.”
- Jesus’ explanation of the parable (vv 37-42)
 - vv 40-42, 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 fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
- Kingdom insight: Followers of the evil one will infiltrate the kingdom & introduce false doctrine

Parable of the mustard seed

- Mt 13:31-32, ³¹ “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 your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”
- Parable probably refers to the black mustard, grown in Jesus’ time for its oil content
- If the emphasis is on the mustard seed’s growth, this indicates God’s kingdom would grow from an insignificant beginning – 12 disciples, plus a small crowd of followers – to an impressive size, spreading throughout the earth
- Another aspect of the parable: birds
 - Dan 4:11-12, ¹¹ “The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.”
 - Mt 13:4 & 19, ⁴ “As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.... ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.”
- Kingdom insight: The kingdom will seem insignificant & small in the beginning, but will grow in size & influence; people who do evil may infiltrate it with false doctrines

Parable of the yeast

- Mt 13:33, “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”
- Positive kingdom interpretation
 - The kingdom currently is internal, not external; it works gradually & continuously to transform those within whom it exists
- Negative kingdom interpretation
 - Jesus was speaking to Jews, so how did they generally view yeast?
 - Mt 16:11-12, ¹¹ How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” ¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
 - Lk 12:1(c), “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”
 - 1 Co 5:6-8
 - ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.
- Kingdom insight: The kingdom will gradually & continuously transform those within whom it exists; evil also will infiltrate the kingdom until Jesus purges it at his return

Conclusion

- The current phase of God’s kingdom on earth is unseen, but gradually growing in size & influence, & gradually transforming those within it
- The devil infiltrates the kingdom with false doctrines & people who do evil
- Jesus will purge the kingdom when he returns to reign from Jerusalem