

Introduction

1. Do you like a good story? We all do. Jesus spoke often by telling interesting stories that each contain an important truth to help us understand who He was and how we should live.
2. Jesus taught using parables.
 - a. Parable (Gk., *parabole*) means “to lay something alongside something else; comparison, illustration, analogy.”
 - b. According to Bernard Ramm, “A parable is an extended metaphor or simile which compares a religious truth with a common experience or circumstance in life.”
 - c. Parables have one central meaning, and each part does not always convey symbolic meaning.
 - d. Parables were an ancient form of teaching even in Jesus’ day. For example:
 - 1) Isaiah 5:1-7 expound “The Parable of the Vineyard.”
 - 2) In Ezekiel 24:3-13 lies the “Parable of the Boiling Pot.”
 - e. While there are many parables in the OT, the NT contains more of them. More than thirty parables are found in Jesus’ teaching in the synoptic gospels of the NT. Interestingly, the Gospel of John does not record any of Jesus’ parables.
3. How can we best interpret parables?
 - a. Read the parable several times.
 - b. Identify the context, setting, and audience.
 - c. Pay special attention to the ending of the parable which often reveals its meaning just like the punchline of a joke. Sometimes, Jesus gave a private interpretation of His parables to His disciples.
4. One important category of Jesus’ parables is the kingdom of God.
 - a. These parables address the rule of God.
 - b. Remember that Jesus came proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand (cf., Mt 4:17, Mk 1:15).
 - c. Jesus’ kingdom parables point to the fulfillment of God’s redemptive purpose for humanity.
 - d. They typically have three primary characteristics:
 - 1) The coming of the kingdom of God is near. There is a sense of urgency that the hearers understand and immediately act upon the message in the parable.
 - 2) The nearness of the kingdom implies an inevitable separation within humanity between those who face God’s righteous judgment with sorrow and those who receive His redemption with joy.
 - 3) The kingdom starts small, but in the end, it is all-encompassing and powerful.
5. We are examining the unique kingdom parables of eight parables found in Matthew 13.
 - a. Parable of Soils (Mt 13:1-23; Mk 4:1-25; Lk 8:4-18)
 - b. Parable of Weeds (Mt 13:24-30); Parable of Weeds Explained (Mt 13:36-43)
 - c. Parable of Mustard Tree (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32)
 - d. Parable of Leavened Loaf (Mt 13:33-35; Mk 4:33-34)
 - e. Parable of Hidden Treasure (Mt 13:44)
 - f. The Parable of the Pearl (Mt 13:45-46)
 - g. Parable of the Net (Mt 13:47-50)
 - h. Parable of the House Owner (Mt 13:51-53)
6. The Parable of the Soils is recorded in all three synoptics, and it addresses the beginning of God’s kingdom in the life and preaching of the good news by Jesus and His followers and the various responses of hearers to that good news.
7. Like Matthew, Mark also recorded the Parable of Mustard Tree which we will briefly review in the next lesson.
8. Why was Matthew so interested in recording kingdom parables?
 - a. Matthew wrote primarily to a Jewish audience. They were looking for the coming of God’s Messiah and the beginning of His kingdom rule on earth.
 - b. That is why Matthew traced Jesus’ genealogy back through David to Abraham.
 - c. That is also why Matthew so carefully recorded Jesus’ important teaching about the kingdom in these parables which give key insight for understanding the nature of God’s kingdom and the place of His followers within it.

A. The Parable of the Weeds (24-30)

1. Remember when studying Jesus' parables to pay attention to their setting, audience, and context.

2. The Setting: Read Mt 13:1-3a.

- a. "That same day..." (1) – Immediately before (cf., Mt 12:22-50) these kingdom parables in Matthew and in Mark's gospel immediately before (cf., Mk 3:20-35) the kingdom Parable of the Soils, Jesus had been publicly rejected as Messiah by the Jewish leaders and His family.
- b. Warren Wiersbe writes, "This chapter records the events of a crisis day in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He knew that the growing opposition of the religious leaders would lead to His crucifixion. This fact He had to explain to His disciples. But their logical question would be, 'What will happen to the kingdom about which we have been preaching?' That question is answered in this series of parables....Jesus explained the course of the gospel in the world. If Israel had received Him as King, the blessings would have flowed out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. But the nation rejected Him, and God had to institute a new program on earth. During this present age, 'the kingdom of heaven' is a mixture of true and false, good and bad, as pictured in these parables. It is 'Christendom,' professing allegiance to the King, and yet containing much that is contrary to the principles of the King....The seven parables describe for us the spiritual course of 'the kingdom of heaven' in this present age. In them we see three stages of spiritual development. 1. The Beginning of the Kingdom (13:1-9, 18-23)...2. Opposition to the Kingdom (13:24-43)...The Outcome of the Kingdom (44-50)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 107-9,11).
- c. The Parable of the Weeds, like the Parable of the Mustard Tree and the Leavened Loaf which follow it, speaks to the issue of opposition to the kingdom.

2. The Audience: This was a public time of teaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum.

- a. The crowd was so large that Jesus had to teach the masses on the shore from a boat.
- b. Craig Blomberg notes, "Many are no doubt wondering: *If the kingdom of heaven has arrived, why has it not triumphed more overtly and visibly? If Jesus is its herald, why is response to him not more uniformly positive?* What the parable of the sower described in terms of four categories of soil with the same kind of seed in each, the parable of the wheat and weeds speaks of in terms of two different kind of seed sown by two different individuals, a farmer and his enemy" (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* in NIV, 218-19).

3. The Context: This is the second of eight kingdom parables recounted in Matthew 13.

- a. The first kingdom Parable of the Soils (Mt 13:1-23) was also recorded by Mark (cf., Mk 4:1-25), and Luke (cf., Lk 8:4-18).
- b. This first kingdom parable related to the reception of the message of God's kingdom by human hearers. Some hearers simply don't respond to the gospel due to hard hearts. Others receive it with initial enthusiasm but fail to follow through with real commitment. Still others receive it but fall away when faced with adversity. Finally, some hearers not only receive it but also follow through by becoming fruitful members of God's kingdom.

4. The Parable of the Weeds is unique to Matthew's gospel.

a. **Read Mt 13:24-30.**

b. "The kingdom of heaven is like..." (24)

- 1) The use of the word "like" (Gk., *homioth*) is a common way that Jesus introduced a parable (cf., Mt 13:31,33). This Greek word lies at the beginning of our word homogenized, which means that the product is alike or the same throughout.
- 2) Jesus clearly stated that this was a "kingdom of heaven" (Gk., *basileia ton ourpanon*) parable.
- 3) Remember that Matthew referred to the kingdom of heaven out of respect for the Jewish custom of not saying the divine name. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same.

c. Sowing or watching a man sow wheat would have been a common experience for those listening. (24)

d. Jesus introduced an "enemy" (Gk., *echthros* - cf., Mt5:43ff) of this man who secretly by night scattered "weeds" (Gk., *zizania* – "darnel; false wheat") among the freshly sown wheat. (25)

- e. G Campbell Morgan writes, “Darnel...is so much like wheat that in the first stages of its growth it is impossible to distinguish between them. Yet they are absolutely different...there is no doubt whatever as to the essential difference between the two. This difference, however, is only manifested in development...and in that manifestation there will be vindication of the destinies of darnel and of wheat. The darnel will be bound in bundles for burning. The wheat will be gathered into the garner of the owner” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 151).
- f. The man’s servants eventually noticed what the enemy had done when the darnel started to sprout along with the good wheat. (26)
- g. The servants of the man came to him with two questions: (27)
 - 1) ““Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field?” ...”
 - 2) ““Where then did the weeds come from?””
- h. The man instinctively knew and declared, ““An enemy did this.’...” (28)
- i. The servants of the man wanted to know what to do next and asked, “...‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’” (28).
- j. The man wisely answered, ““No...because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest (Gk., *therismou*). At that time (Gk., *kairo*) 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” (29-30).

B. The Parable of the Weeds Explained (36-43)

1. Jesus sometimes explained the meaning of His parables to His disciples after the fact. **Read Mt 13:36-43.**
 - a. The disciples came to Jesus after His first Parable of the Soils with a general question about why He spoke in parables (cf., Mt 13:10-17).
 - b. Jesus went on to explain the meaning of the Parable of the Soils to His disciples (cf., Mt 13:18-23).
 - c. For this second Parable of the Weeds, the disciples came to Jesus privately when they were back in the house to ask its meaning. (36)
 - d. Jesus answered their question by giving the kingdom parallels for seven elements in the parable:
 - 1) “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man” (37) – There are good, godly people in this world who follow Jesus wholeheartedly.
 - 2) “The field is the world (Gk., *kosmos* – “all creation”)...” (38a) – Both good people and evil people are a part of this fallen world.
 - 3) “...the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.” (38b) – In the Parable of the Soils, the seed represented the gospel, but in this parable it represents those who have heard and received the gospel.
 - 4) “The weeds are the people of the evil one...” (38c) – These are those who reject the gospel and follow their own way apart from God.
 - 5) “... and the enemy who sows them is the devil (Gk., *diabolos* - “double-tongued; impostor”) (39a) – The devil is the one who tempts us to reject the gospel and to go our own way apart from God just as he did.
 - 6) “The harvest is the end of the age...” (39b) – The kingdom is here and will last for some unknown period before the end comes.
 - 7) “...and the harvesters are angels” (39c) – John’s description of the end times in Revelation uses much imagery of angels (Gk., *aggeloi* – “messengers”) who will be sent out to carry out God’s commands for judgment of the wicked in this world and for the redemption/protection of those who have placed their faith in God.
2. Jesus gave the plain meaning of the parable in Mt 13:40-43.
 - a. Remember that one of the key characteristics of the kingdom parables is the inevitable separation within humanity between those who face God’s righteous judgment with sorrow and those who receive His redemption with joy.
 - b. Jesus painted a clear picture of the coming judgment at the end of the world when He will return to judge “all who do evil” (Gk., *tous poiountas ten anomian*) and to bring the “righteous” (Gk., *dikaioi*) into the fullness of God’s eternal kingdom.
 - c. Jesus ended His explanation with the command, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” (43b)

- d. Jesus emphasized another key characteristic found in the kingdom parables. There is an urgency about His message. Hearers must understand and immediately act on the message in the parable.
3. The three opposition parables point out that God's kingdom will contain "false Christians" (Parable of the Weeds), "false growth" (Parable of the Mustard Tree), and "false doctrine" (Parable of the Leavened Loaf). Wiersbe concludes, "These three parables reveal that Satan is primarily an *imitator*: He plants false Christians, he encourages a false growth, and he introduces false doctrine" (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 109). We will examine the other two opposition parables, the Parable of the Mustard Tree and the Leavened Loaf, briefly in our next lesson.

C. Reflections

1. Do you have a better appreciation for Jesus' teaching by parable?
2. Do you know the key characteristics of a kingdom parable and how to interpret it?
3. Have you received the good seed of the gospel personally?
 - a. Have you really opened your heart to hear the gospel?
 - b. Have you really believed or have you let Satan and doubt snatch your faith away?
 - c. Are you committed wholeheartedly to follow God no matter what comes at you, good or bad, in this life?
4. Are you producing abundant kingdom fruit (i.e., growing in your faith and discipleship, leading others to Christ, living like Christ in the world as you serve others in His name, worshiping God wholeheartedly)?
5. The miracle of the kingdom of God is that weeds can become wheat by placing faith in the Owner.
6. Are you living life as a member of God's kingdom in a way that reveals your urgent expectancy of the coming of the kingdom of God not only in the future at the end of time but also in and through your life right now?