

The Growth of the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Our first reading comes from Psalms chapter 78 verses 1 to 8 on page 582.

My people, hear my teaching. Listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable. I will utter hidden things, things from of old, things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us.

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. He decrees statues for Jacob and establish the law in Israel, which He commanded our ancestors to teach their children.

So the next generation will know them. Even the children yet to be born, and they in turn will tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and will not forget His deeds, but will keep His commands.

They will not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirit were not faithful to Him. This is the word of the Lord.

[1 : 30] The second reading comes from Matthew chapter 13 verses 24 to 43 and is on page 979. Jesus told them another parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

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? An enemy did this, he replied. The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up?

No, he answered, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I would tell the harvesters, First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned.

Then gather the wheat and bring it to my barn. He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.

[2 : 34] 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. He told them still another parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables.

He did not say anything to them without using a parable. 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.

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. He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the son of man.

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, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are the angels.

[3 : 33] As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 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.

They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

Whoever has ears, let them hear. This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, everyone. My name is Jeff.

I am the children's pastor here at HCD. Would all the kids like to come and join me down the front? Sunday school leaders will like to come too. Parents, you can come if you want.

You don't have to. So an outline in the pew sheet that you might find helpful as well.

[4 : 36] How do I pray for us? Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that you continue to speak to us through it.

And what you have to say is still very much relevant for us today. And so, Father, we do pray that you might this morning give us ears that hear. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, no one likes being on a losing team, do they? I remember being at school and we'd have those inter-school sports days, usually on a Friday.

And I went to a school which had their acronym ICS on the next slide. Just those. And it stood for Illawarra Christian School.

That's the school I went to in high school. And so every Friday we'd have sport and every Friday we'd lose every game. In fact, it got so bad that the other schools changed the meaning of ICS from Illawarra Christian School to I can't score.

[5 : 42] It got depressing. And we all wanted to know when we would finally win. But as Christians, we can sometimes feel like that, can't we? That we're on the losing team.

I mean, when we look at our society, it feels like it's becoming less Christian, not more Christian.

And there seems to be growing opposition to Christianity. So one of the blokes in a Bible study this week said at his son's school last year for the Christmas concert, they were not allowed to sing Christmas carols for the Christmas concert.

And when we tried to voice our concerns, we're treated as insignificant and our concerns go nowhere. For example, the removal of CRE from school curriculum.

And now the push for it to be replaced with this so-called safe schools program, which doesn't push a neutral worldview. It pushes an anti-Christian worldview. And when we pray for people and share the gospel with people, there seems to be no response.

So as Christians, it can feel like we're on the losing team. That we're no better off being part of God's kingdom or family. And that the kingdom itself feels small and insignificant and like it's shrinking.

[6 : 54] Well, today, as we return to the parables of Jesus, we'll see some truths which speak directly to those feelings. But first, let me remind you of the scene and the purpose of parables, which is point one.

And come back to the beginning of chapter 13 to verse one. Just let me recap from last week.

Remember verse one. That same day, Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake.

Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables saying dot, dot, dot.

So remember from last week, that same day refers to the same day where Jesus witnessed a growing divide in people's responses towards him and towards his teaching.

Like we saw in chapter 12, verse 46, just above chapter 13 there, where his biological family were outside the house, wanting Jesus to come and listen to them. While his true family, his disciples were inside the house listening to him.

[7 : 55] And so that same day, Jesus goes outside the house and speaks in parables to the crowds. And to highlight this divider response that people were having to his teaching.

In fact, this inside and outside the house movement highlights this division. Well, this week, it's still that same day. And Jesus is still teaching in parables.

And so come with me to verse 34 towards the other side of the page. Just to set the scene. Verse 34, Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables.

He did not say anything to them without using a parable. And so do you see the scene? Jesus is teaching the crowds only in parables that same day. Why only in parables?

Well, to highlight this growing divide as we saw last week. Remember, the parable would divide the people between those who have ears to hear and came to Jesus and those who did not and just went home.

[8 : 55] But he also did it to fulfill scripture. Do you see verse 35 there? 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.

This quote is from Psalm 78, our first reading. And Psalm 78 is basically a parable of Israel's past. That is, it speaks about known events in Israel's history and calls on the readers to hear the truth that those events point to.

And that's why the psalm actually starts with, give ear to my teaching, hear the words of my mouth. In other words, don't just listen to these events, these stories, but understand and hear the truth they point to.

And this is exactly what Jesus is doing that same day, you see. Speaking in parables. He would speak about known events such as farming and mustard seeds to point out truths about the kingdom.

And then he would say, like he does in verse 9 and 43, whoever has ears, let them hear. Just like Psalm 78. I tried this with my kids this past week, actually. I said, there was once a father who gave his child \$1 for getting his slippers for him.

[10:07] Whoever has ears, let them hear. The TV was on, so no one heard. But those who did have ears to hear in Jesus' day, those who perceived some truth in Jesus' teaching and wanted to learn more, well, they would come after Jesus and learn more.

These are the disciples, which included more than the 12, you might remember. In fact, the word disciple just means learner, student. So we read in verse 36. Then he left the crowd and went into the house and his disciples came to him and said, explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field and so on.

Now, I think it's at this point inside the house that Jesus explained the parables, including, I think, verses 10 to 23, which we looked at last week. But that's the scene and the purpose of the parables.

And with that in mind, let's have a look at these three parables. But let's have a look at them with our ears ready to hear. So point two, we'll pick it up at verse 24.

So Jesus told them another parable. The kingdom of the heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

[11:20] When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did the weeds come from? An enemy did this, he replied.

The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up? No, he answered, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 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 them into my barn. He told them another parable.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. There is the smallest of seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree. So the birds come and perch in its branches.

He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in or literally hid into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.

[12:23] Now, I wonder if your ears were hearing. Did you notice that these three parables, for example, all start the same way? Did you hear that? He told them another parable.

In verse 33, the word still is actually not in the original. So it's exactly the same phrase each time. And so it seems like Matthew is deliberately grouping these three together.

And when in the Bible you see illustrations grouped together like this, it usually means they have a common theme. And so if we look for some common themes, we might see the idea of growth, for example.

So verse 30, the weeds and wheat grow together. Did you notice? Verse 32, the mustard seed grows. Even with yeast, in verse 33, there's this idea of yeast spreading throughout the dough. You know, an idea of growing. So we see this idea of growth that is common to all of them. But there's also something else that's common to all of them. There's a contrast between now and the end.

[13:24] Did you notice? So the wheat and weeds grow together. Verse 30. But at harvest time, they are separated. Verse 31. See the contrast? Or the mustard seed. It is the smallest of seeds in

verse 32.

But it grows to become the largest of all garden plants. See the contrast? Or the bit of yeast spreads in the beginning until it has spread through all 60 pounds.

It hasn't spread very far at the beginning and it spreads all the way through at the end. So if these parables are about the kingdom, which is what Jesus has said they are, then it seems Jesus is talking about the nature of kingdom growth and how it looks now compared to how it will look at the end.

Do you see how having ears or eyes that are wide open means we can start to see the truth behind these stories? And I'm deliberately doing this as a way of trying to help you read the Bible for yourself.

But if we keep looking, we can see the particular truth about the kingdom growth that is being made in each parable. We'll end with the parable of the weeds, just as Jesus does.

[14:31] So let's start with the mustard seed in verse 31. He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 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.

The next slide is a picture of a mustard seed. Now, it's not literally the smallest seed in the world, but it's pretty small, isn't it? Pretty insignificant. And yet, on the next slide is a mustard seed plant fully grown.

There's a guy in front to show the difference. Now, it may not be the smallest seed, it may not be the biggest tree, but the idea is that of contrast, isn't it? It reminds me of that song you hear on those superannuation adverts.

Do you know those ones from Little Things, Big Things Groom? I'm not going to sing it. What's more, the picture of a tree in verse 32 with birds coming to perch in it was a well-known Old Testament picture of a great kingdom, the tree, which ruled over many nations, the birds that perched in it.

And so, in Daniel and Ezekiel, that occurs. And so, the point is that the kingdom of God may look small and insignificant to start with. Indeed, it only started with one man, Jesus.

[15:53] But on the last day, when it is fully grown, it will be the largest of all kingdoms and rule over all nations. See the point? It's a similar idea with the parable of the yeast.

So, verse 33. He told them still another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and hid into about 60 pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.

That is, there's a small amount of yeast which the woman hid into 27 kilos of flour. That's a lot of flour. To put it into perspective, I looked up on Google and it says that's enough flour to make 1,620 pancakes.

I don't know if that's true or not, but that's what it said. That one commentator said it's enough to make bread to feed 100 people. It's a lot of dough. And yet, the yeast keeps spreading until, it says, it has worked through all of it.

So, like the mustard seed, here we have the truth that the kingdom may seem small and insignificant and its growth may even seem hidden or invisible. But it will keep spreading until it's spread throughout all the world.

[17:01] Indeed, this is what the Old Testament promised. And so, on the next slide, it's a verse from Zechariah, which says, The Lord will be king over the whole earth.

On that day, there will be one Lord and his name, the only name. That will be a great day, won't it? But until that day, the kingdom will keep spreading like yeast through flour.

And the way it spreads is through proclaiming the gospel, the kingdom, that is. Now, the gospel may feel like it's ineffective. I mean, have you ever shared it with someone or spoken with a family member about it?

And then nothing, no response, no change. Yet this parable reminds us that as the yeast is powerful to transform a large amount of flour, so too the gospel is powerful to transform the lives of those in the world until the kingdom encompasses the whole world.

Again, it reminds me of a verse from Isaiah in the Old Testament. So on the next slide, So they're the first two little parables.

[18:22] A picture of small beginnings, big end. But in the meantime, we have to also remember that the kingdom growth will be alongside opposition until Jesus returns.

We saw that with the kids talk, didn't we? It brings us to the third parable of the weeds and the wheat. We've already read in verse 30 where the weeds and the wheat grow together. Do you notice that? Sounds very much like my garden, actually. Excuse me, I even had someone say to me this past week that they'd happily weed the garden because it looks so bad. I was tempted to reply, Well, Jesus said, let the weeds and the wheat grow together. What comforting words for us non-gardeners. Of course, they grow together, verse 29, in case the wheat is pulled up by accident and only until, verse 30, the harvest time. For then they are separated and up in two very different locations, don't they? Either in the barn or burned. Now, Jesus gives us some help with this parable. So if you turn over the page, actually down the bottom of the page to verse 37, let's hear the explanation. [19 : 31] Verse 37, When Jesus answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 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, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 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.

They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Here we are told that the weeds stand for, literally, the sons of the kingdom. You might remember in the ancient world, the sons were the ones who inherited from the Father.

[20 : 37] So the sons of the kingdom will inherit from their father, whereas the sons of the evil one, that is the devil, will inherit the judgment that belongs to their father, the devil. But do you notice, they grow alongside each other to start with.

That is, Christians and non-Christians will grow together in the world, side by side. That means two things. First, it means Christians will suffer the effects of living in a fallen world, just like non-Christians will.

You see, sometimes we feel like we should be better off. I mean, after all, aren't we God's people? Doesn't he love us? So shouldn't we have a healthier and wealthier life than everyone else? Well, no.

Though God will always be with us to help us through it. Rather, Christians and non-Christians will experience the same fallen world. In fact, Christians will sometimes have it harder.

For just as the weeds oppose the wheat and battle for sun and water and so on, so the non-Christian world opposes us and battles us for truth, denying biblical truth and asserting its own truth.

[21 : 43] And sometimes the world even physically opposes us, like we saw in the kids' talk. So it's like Christians suffer evil acts, as we've seen with ISIS and so on.

And so Jesus is saying the nature of kingdom growth means it will be alongside those who oppose us for a while. And part of the reason for this is so that the weeds don't get pulled up by mistake. Remember verse 29? The owner says, don't pull up the weeds just yet in case you pull up the wheat just yet in case you pull up the wheat as well.

And at first I thought this was just a picture of weeds entangling the wheat. So if you try and pull out a weed, you might accidentally pull out the good stuff, the wheat as well. But someone at Bible study reminded me about how God is holding off sending the angels to harvest the world so that those who are weeds at the moment might hear the gospel and become wheat, might become Christians.

And so verse 29 could mean that the harvesters might accidentally pull up some weeds that God has chosen to become wheat later on as they hear the gospel.

[22 : 56] Either way, this growing together will not last forever for there will be a harvest day, a judgment day. And on that day, Jesus, the son of man, who in Daniel 7 is the one who rules over the whole world, he will return.

His kingdom will encompass the whole world and he will send his angels to weed out of his world kingdom all evil and all those who are sons of the evil one. There will be separation. And the horrifying news is that those who are sons of the devil will inherit their father's judgment, which is a

blazing fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And while us who are sons of the kingdom will inherit our father's kingdom and will shine like the sun. It's a huge contrast, isn't it? So here are the three parables about the nature of kingdom growth.

The contrast between how it looks now and how it will look on the last day. But in verse 43, Jesus ends with, whoever has ears, let them hear. And the odd thing is that he's speaking to his disciples at this point, to those who have already come to him, who have already heard something in the parables.

So why does Jesus tell them, whoever has ears, let them hear? Well, I think he means here to really hear the implications of his teaching and live in light of it.

[24 : 15] So we're at point three. And let me try and quickly draw out three broad implications. At first, hear the warning to be prepared. From the wheat and weeds, Jesus makes it very clear that there are only two types of people in the world.

You're either wheat or weed, either a son of the kingdom or a son of the devil. There's no sitting on the fence as much as people love to sit on the fence.

And so the question I need to ask at this point is, which one are you? Now, the way you can tell is by whether you believe the gospel message or not.

You know, the message that says, Jesus is the king who died to pay for our sins and the king who rose to prove he can raise us to heaven. Do you believe this? Do you trust in Jesus with your life? If you do, then you are a son of the kingdom. But if you don't, then I'm sorry to say that means you're a son of the devil who will inherit the devil's judgment. And so please, if you haven't already, turn and trust in Jesus.

[25 : 21] that you might be prepared for harvest day, for judgment day. For us who have already turned to Jesus, there's also a warning to be prepared. To be prepared for this life by having right expectations.

You see, a lot of angst in life comes from wrong expectations. And one of our children came home at the end of the week and dropped their bag on the ground, exasperated and said, life is so hard. They're in primary school. And so I said to them, well, we live in a broken world so you can't expect life to be easy. To which they looked up and said, Dad, I don't need a sermon.

But much of angst in life comes from having wrong expectations. The disciples heard Jesus announce the kingdom of God was at hand, Matthew chapter 4. And they expected the kingdom to come in full right there and then.

In fact, even in Acts chapter 1, they continue to ask, Jesus, are you going to restore the kingdom now? But the warning here is to be prepared for a life that may not be easy because the kingdoms are going to come gradually.

[26 : 29] And so have a right expectation. For the sons of the kingdom will grow alongside those who are not. And despite being in God's kingdom, we will still suffer the same things as those who are not because we all live in a fallen and broken world.

What's more, we will even face opposition from the weeds of the world. So firstly, hear the warning to be prepared. Secondly, hear the encouragement to persevere.

You see, despite appearances, the gospel will transform lives. The kingdom will grow and it will be the greatest. And this is meant to be an encouragement to persevere, especially for those first disciples who started off as a small group and were taking the gospel message to the world.

But it's also meant to encourage us to persevere when we feel like the kingdom is shrinking as we see people move away from Christianity in our society, as church attendance declines in Australia, or as we are made to feel small and insignificant by the government who won't listen to us.

We are to remember that the gospel is effective, that the kingdom will grow and is growing and will become the largest, indeed the only kingdom in the world and will inherit that kingdom and shine like the sun.

[27 : 43] In other words, we are on the winning team. We do remember that and so keep going. What's more, in God's kindness, we have 2,000 years of kingdom growth that we can look at and see evidence of to back up these truths.

So I want to show you a little video clip of what's happening in the Muslim world. Mark Chu put me onto this. So hopefully this works. Throughout the nearly 1,400 year history of Islam, it's resisted the Christian gospel.

For centuries, many Christians tried to reach Muslims with the good news with little success. But according to many reports throughout the Middle East and around the world, that history is changing.

Nizar Shaheen is the host of Light for All Nations, a Christian program seen throughout the Middle East. I see many, many Arabic-speaking people turning to Christ, accepting Him as Lord and Savior.

What's happening nowadays in the Muslim world has never happened before. Father Zachariah Butrus, an Egyptian Coptic priest, is one of the foremost evangelists to the Muslim world.

[28 : 49] He says Muslims of all ages and backgrounds are accepting Jesus Christ. One fanatic Muslim who came to faith in Jesus Christ is Samir Ahmed Mohammed.

He studied for years to become a Wahhabi sheikh, one of the most virulent forms of Islam. He hated Christians and the church, but his heart changed when he heard the gospel.

I dedicated my life to Jesus Christ. Jesus forgave me for my sins. He gave me eternal life and peace. And the second thing, I really suffered in my daily life.

But I had peace, I had joy, because Jesus entered my heart. But Mohammed is just one of many Muslims who are coming to Jesus. Heidi Baker of Iris Ministries sees thousands of African Muslims receiving Jesus and getting baptized.

And so on it goes. Now it is a Christian radio network, but it's backed up by other stories from all around the world. You see, the kingdom is growing despite appearances.

[29 : 53] And so we are on the winning team. Therefore, keep living as sons of the kingdom. So that's the second thing. Hear the encouragement to persevere. And thirdly and lastly, hear their exhortation to proclaim.

You see, if it is true that there are only two types of people in the world, weeds and wheat, then all our colleagues, friends, family are one or the other.

And if it is true that the destiny of the weeds is an eternal blazing fire, but that God is patiently waiting for more weeds to become wheat to be saved by hearing the gospel, then should we not do all we can to see that gospel proclaimed?

Should we not do all we can to support the gospel message going out? Whether in prayer or giving or inviting people to our evangelistic events this year or supporting those like Marty who proclaim the gospel?

And should we not make the most of the opportunities we have to share the gospel? Even pray for more opportunities to do so. After all, God's word never returns to him empty. So you never know how he will use our efforts to grow his kingdom.

[31 : 01] Let me finish. Despite being our school being renamed at sporting events, I can't score. I'd be pleased to know that we did eventually win a game at the end of the year.

Coincidentally, I was away. Whoever has ears, let them not hear any connection with that. But when it comes to these parables, let us all hear the warning, encouragement, and exhortation that we may continue to persevere and proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for these truths that these parables point us to. And so, Father, whenever we feel small or insignificant as Christians, outnumbered by the world, opposed by it, Father, help us to remember these truths, that though your kingdom may feel small, it is growing and will be the largest.

Although your work seems hidden sometimes, it is effective and does transform. And on that last day, we will shine like the sun. Encourage us with these truths, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to stand and sing about this kingdom coming. So let's stand and sing. Amen. Amen. Amen. Your glorious cause, O God, engages us.

[32 : 46] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. May Jesus Christ be known wherever we are. Amen. Amen. We ask not for ourselves, but why are we not?

Amen. We ask not for ourselves, but we are in our knows, we ask not for ourselves, but why are we not? Amen. We ask not for ourselves, but why are we not? Let's sing up for ourselves, but why are we not?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.