

The Patient Gardner

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[0 : 0 0] If you're new with us, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Aaron Roberts, and I look after this service here. I'm on staff here at St. John's, and we're doing a series going slowly through Matthew's Gospel.

So this week, I'm looking at this passage that was just read to us. It's three parables here, aren't there? There are three parables. There's a long one about wheat and the weeds, which Jesus explains, and then there are two teeny tiny ones.

So a big long one, which Jesus explains, and a couple of short ones. But they all share the same start. The start is the kingdom of heaven is like. Now, why does Jesus need all these parables explaining this?

It's not the only time he talks about the kingdom of heaven, but why does he go on and on about this? Because I want you to remember the cultural context. The Jewish people were under Roman rule, and they most likely wanted some kind of, they believed a Messiah was coming.

They most likely wanted some type of military leader to sweep in and free them from Rome, and they wanted it now, and they wanted God to make this happen.

[1 : 0 7] And Jesus was saying, because that's what they thought the kingdom of God would look like. And Jesus was saying, no, no, look, you need to understand a few things, Jesus was saying. You need to understand a few things.

I am not the military revolutionary you're expecting. And the kingdom of God is not just going to happen like, bam, overnight, you're going to be free.

It's going to happen slowly. And your problems are not just Rome. Your problems, people that Jesus was speaking to, your problems are not just politics.

Your problems are social and psychological and physical and sexual and so on and so on and so on. And so Jesus spends all of his time talking about the kingdom of God because the listeners, their idea of the kingdom coming didn't go much past, oh, wow, imagine a world without Roman taxes.

And Jesus is saying, imagine a world without tears. Imagine a world without sorrow, death, injustice, loneliness, guilt.

[2 : 1 6] So Jesus talks about the kingdom a lot. And he uses these little pictures to do it, these word pictures. And the parables we have tonight give us a few ideas, not the complete picture, but a few ideas about what this kingdom looks like.

So that's what I'm going to tell you about. That's what we're going to talk about here. So let's start with the two cheeky little ones. These two cheeky little parables right in the middle. They're one-sentence ones. So verses 31 and 32, I'll paraphrase it.

So a guy sows a mustard seed. It's a really tiny seed, but it becomes this surprisingly large tree that birds nest in. And then verse 33, a woman adds a small amount of rising agent to some dough, and it becomes this really nice big loaf of bread.

So what's the point? It's pretty clear. It's like a simple sort of one idea here. Something small can produce something big. Jesus is saying this small group he's got.

He's got this small group of people, right? He's saying we're starting something here. God has begun something here with this small group, and it's going to change the world.

[3 : 25] And it did. It did, didn't it? In 33 AD, Jesus was crucified by himself, alone.

His followers had deserted him. So after the crucifixion, after the resurrection, there was like 11. And then that grew to about 120, as you read further along in the story in the upper room there.

That's not that impressive. And people sort of thought they were drunk anyway. A couple of fairly solid sermons resulted in a few thousand people becoming Christians in the beginning of Acts.

And that's a pretty good number. Fast forward to 350 AD, 50% of the population of Rome were Christians. So that's about 30 million people.

That's pretty good. You've got about 2 billion Christians today in the world. The Bible has been, the Bible or portions of it has been translated into 3,000 different languages.

[4 : 33] And it's not just sort of like explosive growth back in the days. Like South Korea had, in 1945, they had a Christian population of 2%.

1945. That's about 30% Christian now, South Korea. But this is all random numbers I'm just giving you a note. 50% of Nigeria are Christians.

I met the Anglican primate who's like the big top boss Anglican in Nigeria years ago. I said, how many Christians do you look after? He said, 21 million. That's pretty good.

That's pretty good. Small. Big. God is advancing his kingdom. It's a point of those little ones.

Those cheeky little parables. And that's an important thing to remember in a place like Vancouver, which it can all feel a bit hopeless, can't it? So you could say this.

[5 : 30] You could say, Jesus is saying and reminding us, be patient. God knows what he's doing. God's in charge. He's moving a kingdom forward, even when things look quite unimpressive.

Now let's move to the bigger parallel. Let's spend a little bit more time on this. So a farmer sows some seeds. And then under the cover of darkness, an enemy sows some weeds amongst the good seeds.

I read that there was a Roman law against this. So apparently this was like a thing. This was like a thing that people did. If you didn't like the farmer next door, you'd throw some weeds in his garden in the middle of the night.

It's sort of like today, it'd be like the equivalent of today if you had a business that was like an online business. It would be like somebody putting some malicious software maybe and collapsing your online business perhaps.

So anyway, so these seeds, they sprout and they start growing. And the particular seeds they're talking about here, early on they look just like wheat apparently.

[6 : 39] So the field workers come in. When they start differentiating and seeing that, wow, those aren't actually, that's not wheat. There's a lot of other things in there. They come to the farmer, the field workers, and they say, what have you done?

Where did you go wrong? What did you do wrong here? The farmer realizes he hasn't done anything wrong. He's been attacked. But then he says, because the field workers say, well, let's just pull them all up. And the farmer says, no, no, no, let them grow.

Let them grow. Let the weeds grow with the wheat. Because these particular weeds, he says, because if you pull them out now, they'll damage the good wheat. Apparently this particular wheat, the particular weeds had their roots grew around the things they grew beside.

So the farmer says, let them grow together until the harvest. And then we'll burn the weeds and we'll harvest the wheat. Then in verse 36, Jesus explains the parable.

He's the farmer. The seeds are people. So this is different to the previous sort of seed. It's all turned around from the different previous seed parables. Forget about that one for a moment. Seeds are people as opposed to being the word of God.

[7 : 45] So the seeds are people. There's two different types here. The field is the world. And at some point, there's a harvest. And the wheat and the weeds will be separated.

The people who follow Jesus separated from the people who do not. So that's the basic picture. Let's dig into it a little bit more for just a couple of minutes. So let's remind ourselves of the point of the small parables first because this will feed into it.

So we've talked about the kingdom of God has been launched. We've already been called to be patient. Great things will come from unimpressive starts.

God is doing stuff. Aslan is on the move, to quote Long Witch in the Wardrobe there. So what does this particular parable, this new one, add to this picture of the kingdom? It tells us a number of things.

Two things. First, patience. Patience waiting. God is doing something. The kingdom is growing. That's hard. That's going to be difficult because of the weeds.

[8 : 51] God lets weeds, wheat, grow together in the same field. God lets good and evil exist together for a time.

And we are in that time. And it's a deliberate decision by the farmer. It's a deliberate decision to let this happen by God because he still has people to call into his family.

And we can be like the workers and we can go to the farmer and say, do you know what you're doing? You've gone wrong. You shouldn't have let this happen.

You shouldn't have let these weeds grow up here. We can go to God with questions about timing and actions. I remember last year.

Last year was a hard year for me, a tough year for me. And I remember thinking at one point, you know, I'm in hospital and I'm just emaciated and feeling miserable. And I'm just going, Jesus, let's just call it even.

[9 : 58] Let's just go. Let's just go. Let's just go. Jesus, come back now. Jesus, come back right now. Before the nurse comes because it's going to be ugly. Let's just come back now, Jesus.

I don't know if you've had those thoughts. I have them with some regularity. I met a guy in our service two weeks ago who said to me he had just become a Christian a month previous.

I mean, I'm pretty sure that guy's pretty glad that Jesus didn't come back last year, right? That Jesus didn't harvest last year. Folks, God has a plan.

He has started a revolution. He has a family to grow. But there is a counter-revolution. There are these weeds.

We live with this ambiguity. We live with sort of this spiritual warfare thing going on. But a day is coming. The harvest is coming. And all will be made clear and right.

[11 : 01] And that sounds great. Let's move to our last point. Two points out of this big one, I think. So we've talked about the mustard seed, the incredible growth of the kingdom.

We should be encouraged by that. We've talked about patience. God is advancing his project. He's allowing evil to exist for a time. That's difficult. But he knows what he's doing. Lastly, the harvest.

And this is tough reading. Let me remind you of it. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all the causes of sin and all lawbreakers and throw them into a fiery furnace.

In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

It might be a surprise to you that Jesus speaks more about hell than any other New Testament writer. And he speaks about it with such vivid language.

[12 : 11] Like it's so full on, what Christ says. And why would he do that? Why would he use these pictures, which are so disturbing?

Because it must be a very, very important truth that Jesus wants to get across. These images of fire and darkness and weeping and gnashing.

Jesus uses this language because he's a number of things. He's trying to unveil the danger of living life for yourself, which is what hell is.

It is eternally living for yourself. It's hell is the landing place of those who want to be without God, who want to be the master of their own destiny.

So we can say, yes, hell is a place that God sends people, banishes people. But it's also a place that people have been trying to get to their whole life.

[13 : 17] If you don't want to be with God, if you don't want God. This is what J.R. Packer says. He says, Scripture sees hell as self-chosen. Hell appears as God's gesture of respect for human choice.

All receive what they actually chose. Either to be with God forever worshipping him or without God forever worshipping themselves. And Jesus doesn't just talk about hell.

He talks about the destiny of the good seed. Verse 43. The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of God their father. It's just wonderful, isn't it?

We are image bearers of God. We are made in the likeness of God. We reflect who God is. And so when it says we'll shine like the sun, the sun's like the brightest thing these writers could imagine, right?

Could think of, that they knew of. When we come to church, we reflect the image of God. When we come to church together, it's not like we come into the presence of God so much as we bring the presence of God with us because we are made in his image.

[14 : 32] And we reflect God's image imperfectly. But when God has cleaned the world and he has judged evil, all who have prospered from it and lured others into it, when he has judged evil and cleansed the world and remade it, we will eternally reflect God.

We will be these perfect reflectors of who God is. And we will be with him forever. Now, there is a bit of a paradox here, which I'll finish on.

The paradox is this. If someone goes to hell, they choose it. So in that sense, they deserve it.

They choose it. But if you get to be with God forever in heaven, there's no way you deserve it. This is what the good news of the gospel. This is what the gospel is.

Because it's a miracle you believe this, right? It is a miracle that you believe what you believe. It is a miracle that you are walking with Jesus and you've chosen him and trust in him.

[15 : 51] It has happened not because you deserved it. It's happened because God has put his hand on you and he chose you and he put his very life in you and the Holy Spirit and he's changing you.

And it's all because of what Christ has done on the cross. And tonight, we will remember that when we come to the table. And we will remember what we have been saved from and what we have been saved to.

Amen.