

The Parable of the Sower

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[0 : 00] We'll come back to God's Word after we have sung the next hymn. If you'd like to turn to Matthew chapter 13. Now, the focus of our attention this morning is on verses 31 through to verses 33.

But it would be almost impossible really to grasp what Jesus is doing here without reading the parable of the weeds that precede it.

Because Jesus is building a case here that he wants his people to understand. So we're going to pick our reading up in Matthew 13 verse 24.

And we're going to read through to the end of the explanation which takes us up to verse 43. It's not that long. So, hear the word of the Lord. He put another parable before them saying, The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.

[1 : 38] And the servants of their master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds? He said to them, An enemy has done this.

So the servants said to him, Then do you want us to go and gather them? But he said, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.

Let both grow together until the harvest. And at the time I will tell the reapers to gather the weeds first and bind them into bundles to be bound, but gather the wheat into my barn.

He told them another parable before them saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

He told them another parable, The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour till it was all leavened.

[2 : 55] All these things Jesus said to the crowds in the parables. Indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet.

I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. Then he left the crowds and went into the house.

And his disciples came to him saying, Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field. He answered, The one who sows the good seed is the son of man.

The field is the world. The good seed is the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. And the enemy who sowed them is the devil.

The harvest is the close of the age. And the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the close of the age.

[4 : 00] The son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and lawbreakers, and throw them into the 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.

Well, may God bless his word. We'll come back to that after we have sung together this. So as we come to God's word today, if you can turn again to Matthew 13.

As you do, you'll recognize that we are sort of building on what we said last week from the book of Zephaniah. And I might want to premise this by saying that there is a difference between being optimistic and being hopeful.

Biblically, I'm always hopeful, and so should you be. Biblically, I'm optimistic as well. But of course, some people read the Bible not with a sense of optimism, but with a sense of pessimism, because their interpretation is largely based on the present, and they fail to see what it looks like, what the future will actually look like, because none of us know that future.

[5 : 37] But that's not actually true, is it? Especially when Jesus tells us parables about the future. We can no longer say we don't know what the future will be.

We can say we don't know all the details, but we cannot say we don't know the direction or what will happen in the future. So I hope after last week listening to the book of Zephaniah, you are hopeful. You are a hopeful people that you're able to do what they did and go out and sing aloud at the joy that you have in the Lord because of what the Lord will do in the future.

And of course, what he is doing in the present to make his way to that future. And of course, last week, this was especially important for the young ones, but also for those of you who are older as well, to have it cemented in your mind and in your heart that whatever is, is the will of God.

Whatever we face this year is the will of God. We must never draw the conclusion that the will of God can happen over here and not over there, or it can happen out there but not in here.

[6 : 45] That type of distinction allows us to create a void where God is only living and effective in certain areas.

Well, that type of God does exist in the mind of some, but that God does not exist in Scripture. So whatever is, is the will of God.

And this is something that we then rejoicing. And we illustrated this with a picture. And the picture that we had last week, I want to reintroduce this week so that you can begin to understand from the very beginning why it's important for this to be rooted in your thoughts and in your hearts and your feelings and in your experiences.

Jesus, when he was asleep in the boat and the storm came and the wind and the waves grew, if I can use that language, the disciples, in response to the wind and the waves, woke Jesus, saying to him, do you not care that we are perishing?

Jesus, standing, then calming the wind and the waves, caused the disciples then to say, who is this that can calm the wind and the waves?

[8 : 03] But more importantly, we must recognize that God is the one who sent the wind and the waves in the first place. God is, in many ways, killing two birds with one stone.

In sending the wind and the waves, not only does he expose the lack of faith than the disciples, but at the very same time, he allows the authority and the power of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, to be demonstrated to the disciples.

Who is this that can calm the wind and the waves? Well, only one person in the whole of biblical history can calm the wind and the waves, and that is God. God's the only one who can do that. Read the book of Jonah. God is the one who does that type of miracle. He's the only one who can do that type. But the point is, is that the wind and the waves are not just something God gets his people through, it is something he sends to them in the first place.

And whatever it is, is the will of God, and so the response to that must always be a faithful one towards God. It should not be one that questions God's care for us.

[9 : 10] Do you not care that we are perishing? But so often, the response is, do you not care that we are perishing? And then we are then met with the overwhelming authority of God that he does indeed care because we get through it.

But we get through what he actually sends our way. Well, when Jesus speaks in parables, he is speaking in the context that whatever it is, is the will of God.

That there is no way that Jesus can speak about the future unless he knows what that future is. And the only way he can know what that future is, is if it is already planned within the will of God.

Is if the whole of life works according to God's plan. There's no other explanation for it. Everything that is, is the will of God.

And what the parables do is that they act like a sieve. They allow some things to pass through and they allow other things not to pass through.

[10 : 15] And the reason for this is trying to determine where you sit as you listen to these parables. And so when Jesus has to explain the parable that we use to his disciples, that's not a good sign.

That's actually a sign that they don't understand what he's speaking about. Anytime you have to ask for an explanation, it is because you do not understand.

And so what Jesus is doing here and given the explanation is he is giving that additional grace so that they would see. And when he finishes, let him who has ears hear, and as he begins Matthew 13, let him who has ears to hear, hear.

He is drawing the very clear connection between that people see by hearing. All of God's people see by hearing. They do not see by seeing.

They see by hearing. And so if your ears are attuned to what God is saying, then you're able to see the world in the same way God is explaining it.

[11:25] But if our ears are not attuned to the things of God, then we are blind in this world. We cannot see what God is saying and neither can we see what God is saying in the world as if it was happening.

And so what these proverbs do is that they are sifting those who are consciously sensitive to the things of God from those who are not. Those who don't need any explanation because they get it because their mind is tuned to the mind of God and those who don't get it and therefore need extra explanation.

Now this is an act of God's grace because Jesus has already said that he speaks in parables so that they don't understand. You know, why does Jesus speak in parables?

Well, so that some understand and so that some don't. Well, it doesn't make it easy for everyone.

No, because the purpose of the parable is to test those who are sensitive, whose ears are attuned to what God is saying.

And the parable does that. It tests, in the same way a test does, it tests your level of knowledge of the subject. And the parable is working in exactly the same kind of way.

[12:47] And so when the disciples ask for this parable to be explained to them, they are admitting, they are admitting that they have become like the people around them who have eyes but cannot see, who have ears but cannot hear.

And the way that you become like that is by worshipping things that have eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear, idols. This is the common language throughout the whole of the Old Testament, that you become like what you worship.

Whatever your heart trusts in, whatever your mind is fixed to, whatever you love the most, you become like that thing. You become like it. So it's no wonder some people cannot begin to see and understand and appreciate the things of God.

It's because their true love is blinding them to what God is saying. So how do these parables work?

Well, the two parables that I want to concentrate on in particular are the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven. And so let's begin. Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a grain of a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field, verse 31.

[14:02] Over time, this mustard seed grew into a big plant, into a tree. And what Jesus is doing here is he is drawing our attention to the fact that small beginnings have big ends in this case.

That what something starts out as is not the same as it finishes. That what it is in the beginning is not the same as what it is in the end. It's the same in terms of its nature, but it's not the same in terms of its growth.

The plant, which is the seed, which is sown, becomes a shrub, becomes a tree. Verse 32, to the point where the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

And then Jesus tells another parable here, which we're to pay, of course, even more attention to, at least the context, because Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, verse 34, until it was all leavened.

Now, of course, leaven, in most cases, is seen as a negative thing. Jesus tells us to beware the leaven of the Pharisees. And therefore, is Jesus speaking negatively here?

[15:20] Is he using leaven as a negative symbol or is it a positive symbol? Well, it seems to me that it is positive for the simple reason Jesus likens the kingdom of God, which is positive, to leaven, which permeates until everything is leavened.

Now, those who understand, and there are some, in fact, quite a few, who understand the leaven here to be a negative symbol, because leaven is always negative every time that it is used, they say.

Every time leaven is used symbolically, it is always negative. I have a bit of an issue with that, because how can it be always used negatively when here it is used positively?

Their argument only works if every use of the word leaven is a negative one. So what they say is every other use of the word is negative, therefore this must be negative.

But that doesn't allow for the exception, and neither does it prove a rule. So therefore, it's much more clear to say that what Jesus is saying here in the context is that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven that permeates, grows, until it fills everything.

[16:40] And of course, the picture here is fairly clear, that the leaven is of course what is sown in this present time, and in the end, everything's leavened.

The kingdom of God is sown into this world, and in the end, the kingdom of God fills this world. That's the future. That's what we're looking at.

So the images are clear, but not many people get the point of the image. And that is, do not despise the day as small beginnings. Do not despise the day as small beginnings.

Do not think that if you can't see anything happening now, that nothing is going to happen in the future. I mean, how long does a seed have to spend in the ground where you don't see anything happening before it then becomes the beautiful big tree that fills the garden?

How long does it have to spend there? And so the world is full of plenty of people who draw their conclusions way ahead of time. I can't see anything happening.

[17:49] Everything's going downhill to me. Everything's going downhill. Well, everything's going downhill in the perhaps time frame that you live in, but you go back sort of 50 years, and for many people, everything was going uphill.

Everything is relative to the small time frame that you live in. But what the parable does here is it gives you the beginning and the end. And this is incredibly important for the disciples of the day because Jesus has just turned up.

He's just talked about the kingdom of God having come. Nobody can see it other than in Jesus. Nobody knows how this is going to grow. Nobody knows how this is going to turn the world upside down, but it does.

And here we sit as kingdom people in the kingdom of God because of what Jesus is saying right here. So do not despise the day of small beginnings.

Do not think that if you sow good kingdom seed, that if you are actually sowing and doing the things that you're meant to be doing, that it's going to come to nothing because the world is going to come to an end.

[18:56] But when you read these parables, the world does come to an end, but what actually ends is not the good seed. It is the weeds. They're the things that actually come to an end, not the other stuff.

So do not despise the day of small beginnings. Do not allow your mind or heart to be filled with the idea that everything is going to get worse, that everything has to get worse because that's just the kind of picture that we have in the New Testament.

Well, I don't see that picture, and I'd be hard-pressed for you to demonstrate to me anywhere in the New Testament where that is a picture of the future. It is true that birds come and nest in the branches.

That's not a good thing. It is true that weeds permeate the field of the wheat. That is true, but it is also true that the wheat is growing.

It is also true that the mustard seed is growing. It is also true that the leaven is leavening until the whole lump is leavened. But both are true, but one outperforms the other.

[20:06] One is according to, well, both is according to the will of God, but one lasts forever and the other is destroyed. And so what we have here is a very clear point.

Number one, do not despise the day of small beginnings. And don't trust what you see, trust what you hear. Don't trust what you see, trust what you hear.

That the kingdom of God grows. And it grows by God sowing and those seeds produce good fruit and in time it produces more and it grows and it grows until the whole world is filled with the kingdom of God.

I mean, the promise is that the knowledge of God and the glory of God will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. And in some, not in my lifetime, well, maybe not in your lifetime, but you don't know where you are in light of the future.

You have no idea where you are. But too often, so many Christians live with the sense that Jesus is coming back next year or the year after or the year after that.

[21 : 19] Very, very soon. But what if, what if this isn't going to happen for another 5,000 years? It's too hard for you to imagine that. It's too hard for you to imagine that we are only 2,000 years into the growing and the seed is only just barely above the ground.

But what if that is the case? At least, at least, you ought to admit that that could be true. And so, how much more are you motivated to plant good things for a future where bad things are destroyed and not good things?

Isn't that what God is saying here? That the things that are actually gathered in the end, the things that are actually taken away and burned, are not the good things that were sown, but the bad things.

The things that are actually destroyed are the things that corrupt the kingdom, not the things that actually cause the kingdom of God to grow. So, if you want to invest in the future, the only way it's possible for you to invest in the things of God is to actually look at the things that God wants you to invest in.

And one of the things that I sort of bite my own hand at and as I listen and as I read is that too often people have the necessary biblical interpretation but not the wisdom to go along with it.

[22 : 49] And what's missing is the necessary wisdom to make the right kind of decisions now. Now, if you're thinking, hang on a minute, this sounds a lot like the three sermons on kingdom building that you heard last January.

Well, they are similar but they were taken out of Corinthians, this is taken out of Matthew, it's a different passage, but it is a theme of the New Testament.

The point here is the future is already determined by God. That whatever is, is the will of God. And it's tempting to think that when you don't know what God has said about the future, that it can somehow be whatever you want it to be. I was speaking to someone just the other day, it was actually the carol service after the service, and I was talking to them about the future of food. Is there enough food in the world to feed everyone? Now, this person in particular is skilled in that area, he knows what he is talking about.

[23 : 58] And I said, the trouble with atheistic thinking in terms of poiesis, is that Christians know that they hold to a memetic theory, a memetic origin, that that is, everything is according to order.

When God created the world, it was order. The thing is with poiesis is that most people now believe is that the world is just full of raw material.

And I can do whatever I like with that raw material and turn it into whatever I like. And the trouble is, when you have that type of attitude, you have pollution because suddenly people run experiments and the whole point of an experiment is you don't know what the outcome is until you've run the experiment and if it goes wrong, then you end up with waste and you end up with pollution and you end up with a number of other things.

Now, all of this, of course, is within God's will but it's the unfaithfulness within God's will. And therefore, as we live and as we think about the type of things that we need to invest in and we need to think about the type of things that we need to trust God for, we need to understand that things in this world are not raw materials that we can do whatever we like with them, especially boys and girls.

We now live in a world where even the human body is being considered by some and taught by others that it is nothing more than raw material that you can decide what it is and what it can be used for.

[25 : 23] That is unfaithfulness within the will of God. Faithfulness within the will of God is to say to a boy, you're a boy.

It's to say to a girl, you are a girl. It's quite plain and simple. It's to say to abortion clinics, you are murdering.

That's what you're doing. But the trouble is is we live in a world where those weeds are growing and they're growing and they're growing and they're growing and so we need to make sure as kingdom people that we know what the future is going to be.

Those type of things will not overtake God's kingdom. They will not overtake God's kingdom and though it may look like it at the moment, they will ultimately come to an end because when it comes to the will of God, you are either faithful or unfaithful as I said before, it's not as if the will of God is

happening over here but not over there and therefore, even these young people that are trying to find out what the will of God is for their life, stop trying.

It's really quite clear what the will of God is. Your responsibility is to know whether or not you're being faithful to God's revealed word or unfaithful. Everything else is the will of God.

[26 : 47] Whatever it is, is the will of God. And so what Jesus is doing here is he is taking the risk out of the future. There's no risk. None whatsoever.

There's always risk for those who don't know what the future has in store for them. People always think there is risk when they don't know what the outcome will be but we know what the outcome will be.

Therefore, the question of risk needs to be turned on its head. What kind of risks are you taking by not following Jesus? What is the risk of not following Jesus and trusting him and living for him completely, listening to every single word that he is speaking?

And therefore, the Christian is called here in the sense of this parable to not despise the day of small beginnings, to think that this isn't going to come to anything.

Because it is. God's seed is a good seed that will permeate the whole world. God's kingdom will fill the whole world.

[28 : 03] And it may be true that weeds will grow alongside of it and it may be true that the birds of the air will nest in its branches which is not a good thing because if you go back to the beginning of Matthew 13 verse 4, it actually tells you that the birds of the air are the devil's messengers.

That they are within corrupting the kingdom of God or at least trying to corrupt the kingdom of God. And that's spelled out again in verse 19. That the birds are these which seek to corrupt the church. And J.C. Ryle, the bishop of Liverpool that was, said, you'll never have a pure church. The wheat and the tares grow together. Never have a pure church.

The way the distinction is made is not by who sits next to who. The wheat and the tares grow together. The distinction is which is faithful and which is unfaithful according to the will of God. How is your life demonstrating an ability to follow God's word? And so what we have here in these two parables or the parable of the mustard seed with the birds nesting in its branches is exactly what we have in the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

[29 : 18] That what is sown is good but what comes along after that which is sown is bad. But then when Jesus explains the parable of the weeds he has to explain it to his disciples.

Which is removed and destroyed and which remains? Well when you actually read it the end of the age is the angels coming which are the reapers and what do they reap?

They take away the weeds. They gather them up and they burn them. All matters of lawlessness all matters of sin are removed from the kingdom of God.

What remains but the kingdom of God. It's only the kingdom of God which remains. And so in the will of God God's people are to understand two simple things.

Number one do not despise the day of small beginnings. Number two see by hearing. See by hearing.

[30 : 24] The parables that Jesus speak of here are parables that tell us what is going to happen in the future. And at this present time it just so happens to be the case that we will coexist with the weeds.

That we will have birds in our branches. Messengers of the devil. And we need to know how to recognize the difference. And so what some people say when it comes to the parable of the weeds is the reason why the disciples are not allowed to tear out the weeds from the field is because they cannot tell the difference between the weeds and the wheat.

That's why Jesus told them not to do anything about it. But if you think about that if they're able to recognize that weeds have been sown amongst the wheat then they're able to recognize the difference between the wheat and the weeds.

So the reason for not pulling out the weeds is not because you cannot tell the difference between the two. It's rather because as Jesus says here in case you pull up the wheat along with it.

And so what Jesus is saying here is that even in the church the wheat and the weeds will grow together. Even in the kingdom of God the wheat and the weeds will grow together.

[31 : 47] And therefore you could be trying to deal with the weeds in such a particular way that you end up damaging the weeds in such a particular way that you end up damaging the weed along with it.

How then do we deal with the weeds? Well we deal with the weeds by being faithful to God because at the end of the age God himself will deal with them. He will pick them up, gather them, bundle them and burn them.

And this is the future. This is what it looks like. And so here's the exhortation as we close. Do not despise the day of small beginnings.

Do not despise the day you're in in the will of God. You don't know how far you are in to this mustard seed growing. You have no idea what stage you are at when it comes to the growth of this kingdom.

And too often we think we must be near the end because things are getting worse. But Jesus said that the enemy came along straight after the seeds were sown.

[32 : 56] It's always been this way. It has always been this way where the weeds have coexisted with the weed. So do not despise the day of small beginnings.

Do not have and leave here this morning with the expectation that the future is only negative. When what we're promised here is that God will deal with all the negative things in time and the kingdom will continue to grow throughout time.

You are the kingdom of God. You are part of God's kingdom. And therefore if you're looking for an investment this year, if you're looking for something to invest in, then you need to go back and read the Bible and understand what God wants you to do and not just what he wants you to be.

Okay? Appreciate what God wants you to do and not just what he wants you to be. And I've said, how many times have I said, that my desire and my hope would be that the church would one day be in a position where they are so motivated by the word of God that they would be building like they used to.

Orphanages, hospitals, education centers, schools, hubs, the whole lot. That we would actually be growing the good seed in good fields.

[34 : 16] And while we recognize that this is a coexistence, this is not a case of the good seed being sown in the bad field to grow. Okay? And that's the way the church seems to have gone.

Well, we have to live in this world, let's just borrow what they have. Let's sow into that world. But that's not the way the parable was told. The way the parable was told is good seed is sown and then the enemy seeks to destroy what we've done.

It is not the other way around. And so as we sit here this morning and as we think about going elsewhere, your commitment to God this year should not simply be attending.

And if you can't define your Christian life in any other fashion than attendance, then there's something that we need to question. There's something that we really need to question because something is going wrong if the final analysis of our Christian life is attendance.

Christians. What have we come to if all we do as Christians is attend church? What about all the other stuff that God has called us to be and do?

[35 : 30] And therefore, you ought to be encouraged this morning that because whatever is, is the will of God, that the risk has been taken out of everything. The future belongs to God because he is working all things according to his plan.

The future is determined. It is your desire and your calling to live faithfully according to that word and that will of God, not unfaithfully.

Amen. And the love of God be with you both now and forever more.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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