

Jesus Gave Parables About Tares and the Mustard Seed

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children come to understand that the Lord wants to work both in their lives and then through their lives. The desire of the Lord is to see Christians bear much fruit. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus also gave other parables about the kingdom.

Jesus next compared the kingdom of heaven to a man sowing good seed in his field. Matthew 13:24-26 says, “Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.’” The word translated “tares” talks about a kind of weed that looks almost exactly like wheat when it is growing. The word is used seven times in the New Testament, and they are all in this chapter. However, when the heads of grain appear, the tares are black in color and are weeds instead of heads of grain. As a result, until the heads of grain begin to appear, they are hard to tell from grain while growing.

Since this parable is about the kingdom of heaven, it is the Lord who sows the good seed and in this parable the seeds are the sons of the kingdom. We see that the enemy is the one who sows the tares. The word translated “enemy” can refer either to man or to Satan and speaks of one who hates God. In explaining this parable, Jesus said, in Matthew 13:39, “‘The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.’” From this verse, we see that Satan is clearly the enemy mentioned in this chapter. In Acts 13:10, we see that Elymas is called a child of the devil. In that verse, we read, “And said, ‘O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?’” In that chapter, we see that Elymas was certainly trying to do the work of Satan and hinder Sergius Paulus from coming to Christ. Satan is certainly doing everything that he can to keep his followers from coming to Jesus in repentance and faith. As a result, we have both believers and unbelievers in the world today.

We go on to read, in Matthew 13:27-30, “‘So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’” He said to them, “An enemy has done this.” The servants said to him, “Do you want us then to go and gather them up?” But he said, “No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”” We saw above that the servants who are the reapers of the harvest are the angels. In these verses, we see that the angels can see that tares (unbelievers) are in the world but we also see that they asked Jesus how the unbelievers had gotten into the world. This is one of several places that the Bible makes it clear that angels do not know and understand all things that happen in the world.

We also see that the angels did not know about the way that Jesus would deal with the unbelievers. In fact, we see that the angels asked if they should gather the unbelievers immediately. We see that Jesus explained to the angels that they were to wait until the end of the age before gathering the unbelievers. 2 Peter 3:9 explains why when that verse says, “The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” In this verse, we see that the Lord is longsuffering and patient. His plan is to give people time and the opportunity to repent. Those who do repent will not face judgment at the end of the age because all of their sins will be forgiven and blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ. Those who do not repent are experiencing the patience of God as the Lord gives them this opportunity to turn from sin to God.

We see that Jesus said that there would be both believers and unbelievers until the time of the harvest. Then, will come the time of the judgment of all unbelievers. Jesus described that time of judgment by saying that He will tell the angels that are the reapers at the end of the age to gather the tares first and bind them in bundles to burn them. This judgment is described in Revelation 20:11-12, where we read, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” Here, we see that all unbelievers will be judged individually for the particular sins that they have committed.

In contrast, we see that the wheat will be gathered into the place that Jesus has prepared for all believers. This is a prepared place for prepared people. In John 14:2-3, Jesus told the disciples, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.” In fact, we can look forward to a new heaven and a new earth. Revelation 21:1 says, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.” Then, Revelation 21:4 adds, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” We see a very different future for those who are wheat (believers) and those who are tares (unbelievers).

Jesus then gave another parable in which He compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed. Matthew 13:31-32 says, “Another parable He put forth to them, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.’” A mustard seed is a very small seed. In fact, it is the smallest seed of all of the herbs in the land of Israel and the surrounding countries. However, it can grow into a very large plant. A mustard plant can grow as large as fifteen feet in height so it can become a very large bush, even though it starts out as a tiny seed.

Because the mustard seed is so small, yet grows to a very large size, it is used to illustrate two

different things in the New Testament. The mustard seed is only mentioned five times in the New Testament. In three of the passages, it is used to illustrate the growth of the kingdom of God. Then, in two passages, it is used to illustrate the need for growth of faith. The disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out a demon. Jesus answered, in Matthew 17:20, “So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’” In this verse, we see that Jesus said that if the faith of the disciples was only as big as a mustard seed, nothing would be impossible for them.

In Mark 4 and Luke 13, Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed to illustrate the growth of the kingdom of God, just as it is used in Matthew. Mark 4:31-32 says, “*It is* like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.” Jesus is the One who planted a mustard seed. The field where He planted the seed is the world. In the time of Jesus, the number of people who were true followers of Jesus was very small. All of the disciples of Jesus, except Judas, were from Galilee and they were looked down on by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Acts 4:13 says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Even the Sanhedrin was forced to admit that Jesus had dramatically changed the lives of those men.

However, in the years since the time of Jesus, that message has spread around the world and there are followers of Jesus throughout the world. That is why Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The kingdom will not be complete until Jesus comes to rule for one thousand years and finishes His rule on earth. Revelation 20:6 says, “Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” The number of people who have come to Christ, in repentance and faith, through the years since He returned to heaven involves hundreds of millions of people and that number continues to grow daily around the world.

We also see that the tree shoots out large branches. Jesus said that makes it possible for the birds of the air to nest under its shade. Both the book of Daniel and the book of Ezekiel use birds to give us a picture of the Gentiles. Daniel 4:20-22 says, “‘The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which *could be seen* by all the earth, whose leaves *were* lovely and its fruit abundant, in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home—it *is* you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.’” Jesus showed that the kingdom of God will also include the Gentiles. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the kingdom of God will include people of all nations. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand these things.