

Online Grace Bible School

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**Online Grace Bible School
Phase 3
Advancing the Kingdom**

1. The Power of the Seed

Jesus spoke in parables. 13:10, 34. He did so for two reasons:

- ✓ To reveal. 'Parable' from *para* - alongside; *ballo* – to cast. Thus, an earthly story is cast alongside a heavenly truth to illustrate it. Matt.13:11,12,16-17.
- ✓ To conceal. 13:13-15. Jesus came to reveal truth to everyone who was genuinely open to receive it. He taught in parables, so that genuine seekers would ask for the meaning. See 13:36.

In Matthew 13 there are 8 parables all delivered on the same occasion. The first 4 of these were given to the multitudes (13:34), the next 4 given to the disciples (13:51). They are parables of the Kingdom. Jesus went through every city and village preaching the glad tidings of the Kingdom. 13:11. Earth – World – Kingdom.

The first parable is the key parable. *“And He said to them, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”* (Mk.4:13). The kingdom of God breaks in upon the world, even as seed which when it is sown into the soil breaks through the earth into new life.

A) The Seed. The seed is the Word of the kingdom Matt.13:19. (1 Pet.1:22&25; Jas.1:17,18,21). The seed possesses a principle or germ of life which, given the right soil, will produce life *“by itself”* (Mk.4:28). No human power is needed; no influence of man can cause the seed to sprout. See John 3:8.

B) The Sower. Life and death, heaven and hell depend on sowing. Weeds will grow without sowing, but not wheat & barley. Sin doesn't need a sower. But salvation does. Every Christian is a sower. Don't sow sparingly. Sow beside all waters. Don't observe the wind nor regard the clouds. (Ecc.11:1-6; 1 Cor.3:5-9; Jn.4:35-38).

C) The Soil. The main focus in the parable is the soil. The seed was the same in each case. The gospel receives different responses. Why? The soil represents the heart. 4 examples of different heart conditions.

1) Wayside Soil. This was a pathway through the cornfields. It was so hard and compressed that the seed never entered into it. It lay upon the top and the birds devoured it. A hardened heart is incapable of receiving an impression, like cement. Note the contrast between the Devil's purpose and God's purpose. One is to sow seed the other is to snatch seed. One is to save, the other to destroy.

2) Stony Ground. A thin layer of soil on top of a rock or a slab of limestone. Thus the soil was shallow and the seed had no depth for root. When the sun played upon the seed, it was scorched. Represents those who want God on their terms. Fair-weather Christians. When trials come they are offended and turn back.

3) Thorny Ground. There is only a certain amount of nourishment in the ground. If the weeds get it, the wheat won't. Distraction by two kinds of materialism: i) *“Cares of this world”*. Care = to be drawn in another direction; ii) *“The deceitfulness of riches”*. It is deceitful because it gives a false sense of security.

4) Good Ground. Luke describes this condition as *“an honest and good heart”*. 30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold.

*“Take heed **what** you hear”* (Mk.4:24). *“Take heed **how** you hear”* (Lk.8:18). Everything we do passes through the filter of the heart. *“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”* Prov.4:23.

We are workers together with God. We sow the seed; God prepares the soil.

1) God gives us a new heart. We have received a new heart; it is now a sphere of divine influence.

2) He searches our hearts and causes us to know them. (Ps.139:23&24).

3) He changes our hearts (Heb.13:9; Lk.24:25&32).

We cannot force truth into an unreceptive heart. We sow the seed, but only God can prepare the soil.

2. Satan's Fifth Column

A fifth column is a group of people who covertly undermine a larger group, such as a city or nation, from within, to the aid of an external enemy. The parable of the wheat and tares is about Satan's fifth column.

"Tares" is a reference to a weed called bearded darnel. It has a fungus which, if eaten by animal or man, is poisonous. The problem is that in its early stage, while still in the blade, it looks like wheat. So, if the farmer attempted to uproot the tares before maturity, he would wreak havoc on his crop of wheat.

Sowing tares in an enemy's field was a form of revenge in those days. This parable illustrates the point that Satan couldn't stop the Sower coming into the world, so his next plan is to sabotage His field.

In the first parable Christians are the product of the preaching of the good seed of God's Word. Here we *are* the good seed. 13:38. Jesus referred to His own life as 'seed' that produced "much grain" (Jn.12:24). The Church throughout all ages is the harvest of the original seed of Christ (Rom.6:5).

"...the tares are the sons of the wicked one." In the first parable there was only one sower and one kind of seed. Now we have 2 sowers and 2 kinds of seed. Tares are counterfeit Christians, look-alike Christians. There are "false brethren". There is a difference between professing Christians and possessing Christians.

13:25. The enemy planted them there to cause trouble. The enemy works by stealth, under the cover of darkness. In the Old Testament the Jews were referred to as God's vineyard. They were enclosed by a fence. Now the kingdom of God extends beyond the nation of Israel. The field is the world. The gospel must be proclaimed everywhere. The fence has come down and multitudes are pouring in. But not all are regenerate. The first parable shows that Satan couldn't stop the advent of the Kingdom. This parable shows that he tries to stop the advancement of the kingdom. How does Satan's fifth column go about devastating the Church?

1) By causing offences, 13:41. If he can sow tares amongst the wheat he can disrupt the harmony of the church. Whenever there is church trouble, almost always there is an unregenerate person involved.

2) By replacing godly principles with worldly methods, 1 Sam.13:19-22. Sometimes we allow Philistines in leadership and in the pulpit. We have replaced the Word of God with motivational talks; godly counseling with pop-psychology and Biblical models of leadership with corporate forms of structure.

3) By distractions. Diversion tactics. We must be clear about our priorities and what we will give ourselves to.

4) By activity that is not Spirit-directed. If you eat the seeds from the tares it causes nausea, vomiting, severe headaches and convulsions. A lot of activity; but not Spirit-directed.

13:28. "Do you want us to go and gather them up?" The servants see a need for separation. But they are not skillful enough to undertake the work. In attempting to root up the tares they may pull up the wheat.

E.g. Lot. Judas. Saul of Tarsus. Peter. Ananias & Sapphira. 1 Cor.5. Demas. We are not qualified to separate the wheat from the tares (1 Cor.4:5). People have tried in different ways to separate the two:

- ✓ By force.
- ✓ Creeds, confessions and denominations, Lk.9:49&50.
- ✓ By inspecting fruit. Mt 13:41.

You can't tell whether another person is a possessor or a professor. But:

1. You can know whether you are a true believer, John 20:31.
2. And God knows those who are His, 2 Tim.2:19.

Summary: What did Jesus want us to know? Don't judge the person, but resist the influence.

3. From Little Things, Big Things Grow

Mark 4:13. Jesus interpreted the first two parables, but not the last five. Why? Because the first two parables provide the key to interpreting the remaining five. The first parable shows how God introduces the Kingdom to earth. The second shows that this is met with opposition. So the parables illustrate the spiritual warfare that takes place over the Kingdom of God.

Mark 4:30-32. The mustard seed is a tiny, powder like seed. Jesus was illustrating the nature with which the kingdom would grow - from a tiny seed into a giant herb, like a tree. Great growth from small beginnings.

Trees grow slow; herbs grow abnormally fast, and living only long enough to develop flowers and seed to perpetuate themselves. The point is that its growth is very fast and out of proportion to the size of the seed.

The Kingdom of God is like this.

- ✓ Jesus was a lowly man who lived in a despised part of the Roman Empire, (Isa.53:2&3; John 1:46).
- ✓ He entrusted His kingdom to 11 untrained, unlearned men of lowly birth and status!
- ✓ And, the message He entrusted to them was a stumblingblock to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks.
- ✓ "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?" (John 7:47). "Concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere" (Acts 28:22).

If anything had its beginning as a grain of mustard seed it was the kingdom of God. But its power is inherent. The mustard seed's pungency depicts the quickening power of the gospel, Rom.1:16&17. It was surrounded by tares and corrupted by the leavening influence of false teaching. But it survived and prevailed.

It was met with terrible persecution from the world. But preacher after preacher rose up to proclaim it. Church after church was planted. City after city, nation after nation, fell to the gospel until, within 40 years the gospel had reached all the great centres of the Roman world. Nearly all of Europe, part of Asia and all of North Africa had fallen to the gospel. The flesh, the world and the Devil could not stop it.

See growth of Church in Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 9:35&42; 11:21,24; 14:1; 17:4; 18:8.

This parable would have been a great encouragement to the disciples after the first two. Three parts of the seed in the first parable were lost. In the second tares were mingled with wheat. But the seed contains life. It will grow and become a vast tree in which many weary, hungry souls will find refuge.

Mustard seed is mentioned 5 times in the New Testament, and always in reference to small beginnings or small faith. All that's needed is small faith in a big God. In God's kingdom nothing emerges full grown.

The message of this parable is don't despise the day of small things. Don't judge authenticity by size. Never despair of any work of God because of its feeble beginnings. You are a self-propagating seed. From one seed thousands may spring forth. Each seed possesses the power to become a great tree, (Isa.60:22).

How do I get free of my depression? How do I overcome my lust? If you ask God how does this happen, or how to do this or that, He probably won't give you a "how" type answer. God doesn't do "How to..." God's not into "Seven steps to..." *"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how."*

The key is hidden in the seed. The Word of God, like the mustard seed is pungent and potent. You might never understand the how's, but keep planting the seeds, and wait patiently, they will give you a harvest.

The seeds will change you from within, and release the power of God in everything God has called you to do. You won't need the 'how's' anymore. They become irrelevant. What's important is that you are a part of a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. A kingdom that one day will fill the earth.

4. Beware of the Leaven

Matt.13:33. In Scripture leaven, when used figuratively, is consistently a symbol of corruption. Leaven spreads and corrupts that with which it comes into contact by disintegrating it and breaking it down.

Leaven is anything added to baking that causes it to ferment and rise. In Biblical times it referred to a piece of dough from a previous baking, which had fermented and become acid. Here is the key. The Church was initially made up of people from two different backgrounds – Jews and Gentiles. Each brought their past influence into the Church which had a leavening influence. The apostles had to deal with these things:

1) Legalism, Gal.5:1-9. Judaizers attempted to bring the Law into the church but, like leaven, its effect was to corrupt. Paul sought to preserve it from corruption. He does so by teaching the true way to holiness – Christ. We were baptized into Christ, meaning we died to the Law and have become married to Him. He is now the source of our holiness. When one works with the Law he falls back into the power of his flesh. When one lives by grace He lives by faith in the Son of God and experiences God working in Him.

Legalism, then, is leaven. It nullifies the grace of God (Gal.5:2,4). When we relate to God via the law we leave the realm of grace and Christ is of no effect to us. It is grace, not law, which gives us victory over sin. Rom.6:14. So Paul seeks to prevent the corrupting influence of the leaven of legalism entering the Church.

2) Licentiousness, 1 Cor.5:6-8. This passage is not addressing a situation where someone is struggling with sin, but rather a person using the message of grace to live in sin. Some taught this in the Early Church. Jude 4. This too is leaven. How does Paul address the problem of one who wanted to go on living a life of sin?

He does not tell us to do something to become unleavened. He says that we truly *are* unleavened because Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Cor.5:7). We deal with sin by grace. Begin with identity and let that transform you. Position leads to condition. Eph.4:1. Rom.12:1. Being precedes doing. Be who you are.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a part of the Feast of Passover. Both symbolized the work of redemption from Egypt. The blood of the Passover Lamb represented the work of forgiveness of sins. Unleavened bread was waved before the Lord symbolizing the work of holiness, which is also a part of the work of redemption. God who took Israel out of Egypt is the One who takes Egypt out of Israel.

The woman “hid” (Gk. *enkrupto*), i.e. to hide in or to mix. *Enkrupto* from which we get our word ‘encrypt’. When someone encrypts a message they mix it up so that others do not understand what is being said. The major idea is to be sneaky or covert. Interestingly, both forms of leaven came in by stealth, (Gal.2:4; Jude 4).

The leaven was hid in three measures of meal:

- ✓ The Leaven of the Pharisees. Man-made teaching corrupting the Word of God, Mark 7:6-13.
- ✓ The Leaven of the Sadducees. The power of reason corrupting the Word of God.
- ✓ The Leaven of the Herod. Mark 8:14&15. Humanism corrupting the Word of God. The Herod’s, unlike the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were not a part of the race of Israel. They were Edomites, descendants of Esau. They were of the flesh, earthly, worldly, godless.

When leaven is introduced it is impossible to separate it from that with which it is mingled.

“Three measures of meal.” *“So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes”* (Gen.18:6). God came down with two angels and had a meal with Abraham. What was the focus of this fellowship? The birth of the Promised Seed!

Christ is the Bread of life. Jn.12:24. *“I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (2 Cor.11:3.) The whole purpose of Scripture is not to give us information, but to bring us to Christ.

5. The Treasure and the Pearl

Matt.13:44-46. These 2 parables are a pair. Jesus is no longer talking with the multitude, but with the disciples, and is back inside the house (Mt.12:46&47; 13:1,36). In parables 1-4 it seems that God's purpose would end in failure - the kingdom as seen by man. The next parables describe the kingdom as seen by God.

Man-based Christianity sees the Christian as being "the man" in all these parables who diligently seeks salvation. His efforts are rewarded by his finding Christ, the treasure and the pearl of great price. But note:

- ✓ Jesus, not us, is "the man" in these parables. See Matt.13:3, 24, 31, 37.
- ✓ He was not lost, we were! He does the seeking, not us.
- ✓ We didn't sacrifice all to gain Him, but He all for us. Isa.64:6. Isa.55:1.

God has two elect peoples who are precious in His sight, and through these two people He will manifest the inexhaustible riches of His grace and glory. One is the treasure hid in the field, i.e. the nation of Israel; the other is the pearl, i.e. the Church. One is an earthly body, and has an earthly destiny; the other is a people with a heavenly calling, citizenship, and inheritance. The order is: "To the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Therefore, the treasure in the field (Israel) is given before the pearl (the Church).

The Treasure Hid In The Field. In Israel, treasure was hidden in the fields rather than in the house. The field was the only bank, (Job 3:21; Prov.2:4). But sometimes the owner died without revealing where the treasure was hidden! If a workman found treasure in a field that was not his, the only way he could possess it would be to purchase the field. The only way he could do this would be to sell everything he had.

The treasure is Israel (Psa.135:4; Deut.14:2; Mal.3:17). Not once is the word 'treasure' used of the Church!

It was hid in the field; the field is the world, (Deut. 32:8-10). The parable starts with the treasure hid in the field, and the OT begins with *Israel* hidden in the field! Christ finds Israel now as a nation, but it rejects Him and is hidden again amongst the nations of the earth through the Dispersion until the end.

The Pearl of Great Price. In the ancient world the pearl was the loveliest of possessions. Pearl merchants were travelers. This man was seeking a pearl. When he found it he esteemed it of such value that it was worthy of giving up all to gain it. The pearl is the Church. Let's consider this pearl.

1) A pearl, unlike any other precious stone, is the product of a living organism. The pearl is produced as the result of an injury to an oyster, e.g. a grain of sand or some parasite intruder. It enters and pierces its side. The oyster surrounds the invading presence by secreting mother-of-pearl, a slimy substance also called nacre. It releases thin layers of nacre until gradually, layer after layer, the pearl is formed. So, out of much suffering an object of beauty and value is produced. The offending particle becomes a pearl of great price.

Similarly, we who were the cause of Christ's death became the pearl of great price. The Church is now precious in His sight because of the price He paid for her. We are redeemed by His precious blood.

2) Matt.13:45. The merchant man deliberately set out to find this pearl. After the death and resurrection of Jesus the price was paid for the Church and the Holy Spirit left heaven to seek out the Bride of Christ.

3) It is a significant fact that a pearl is the only gem whose unity cannot be broken without destroying it. I can take a diamond and cut it into two, and then I have two diamonds. I can take a lump of gold and divide it into two, and I have two lumps of gold. But if I take a pearl and cut it into two, I have nothing: I have destroyed it!

4) The pearl is an object that is formed slowly and gradually. A pearl does not come into existence in a single day. The church might grow numerically very quickly (mustard seed) but its transformation is gradual.

6. The Dragnet and the Scribe

Matt.13:47-50. A dragnet (trawl net) was very long and very deep. It had floats of wood on the top and was weighted by lead at the bottom. It was made to sweep the bottom of the sea and gather fish in masses. Sometimes it was tied on the shore at one end and put out by a boat at the other end which was then drawn to land by ropes. Or it was held between two boats then hauled in. Its purpose was to capture everything in its path in it. Once ashore the catch was sorted. The good fish kept alive till market; the rest thrown away.

- ✓ The wide-sweeping, all-embracing nature of the net symbolizes the scope of the gospel. Jn.3:16.
- ✓ The sea symbolizes the Gentile nations; people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, Rev.5:9.
- ✓ The fishermen are those who cast the gospel net, (Lk.5:10).
- ✓ The judgment takes place when the net is full. When the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
- ✓ "Good" (v.48) is interpreted as 'just' or 'righteous' in v.49. (Lk.18:9-14; Jn.3:18&19). Everyone will either die in their sins or die in the Lord, (John 8:24; Rev.14:13).

The net was pulled in when it was full, not of good fish but of those who had heard the gospel. The same net that is dragging men and women to heaven is leaving others without excuse, (Jn.15:22&24; 2 Cor.2:15&16).

The angels will separate the wicked from the just. Currently angels minister to those who are the heirs of salvation. Then they will be involved in gathering the wicked from the righteous.

The Scribe

13:51&52. The scribes were teachers of the Law. They were qualified to teach in the synagogues. They were originally taken from the priests and Levites. Ezra is an example of a good scribe: 1) He read the law; 2) He gave the meaning. By the time of Jesus they had become a party. And instead of teaching and applying the Law they surrounded it with their own traditions and laws. They were not instructed about the kingdom of heaven. E.g. Nicodemus was a teacher and leader of Israel, (see John 3:10; Matt. 23:13).

A scribe who is instructed concerning the kingdom of God is able to bring forth *treasure*. One who isn't will bring forth *tradition*. Tradition is an echo of what others have said (e.g. the party/denomination). Treasure is the truth revealed by the Spirit. When you teach tradition it's a *job*; when you share treasure it is a *joy*.

This treasure consists of bringing forth things new and old. The old is the Old Testament scriptures. The new is the teaching of the Kingdom, (Rom.15:4; 1 Cor.10:11). Everything we preach must lead to Christ otherwise it is only religion. "...in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col.2:3).

Who is the householder. To *the disciples* He asked, "*Have you understood all these things?*" When they answered in the affirmative, it was to *them* He gave this instruction in verse 52. Not everyone in a family is a householder; not every person is a scribe or teacher or pastor. Those who *are* have a God-given responsibility to bring out of their treasure things new and old. The householder represents pastors doing the work of feeding the household of faith.

A teacher must learn and understand before he teaches. First we are disciples and then apostles. First we are called and then sent.

Jesus shows that a minister of God's household has a truly rich, inspired storehouse of essential spiritual treasures from which he can draw to perform his duties. "*Do you understand these things?*" "*Yes, Lord*". In the first parable the heart is like soil into which the word is sown. In the last it is like a treasury out of which the Word is brought forth to benefit others. First put in then taken out.

Paul was the greatest example of this. "*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*" (Eph.3:8).