

Matthew 21-01-10b

Let's pick up our study now and we're looking at the parable of the wheat and the tares. And it's such an interesting come to pass, an interesting structure in the Gospel of Matthew that once again, before we get Jesus' explanation of this parable, there is intermediate material. Until this time, there are two additional parables and once again, an explanation of why parables are being used.

So after verse 30, gather the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them and gather the wheat into my barn, we have verse 31, 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 of 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. What's the first thing you notice about this third seed parable that distinguishes it from the first two? There's actually two things that distinguish it immediately. As soon as he says, the kingdom of heaven is like a seed and then there's an adjective mustard, right? The number and the type are different than the preceding two parables and the preceding parables, the seed appears to be wheat in the first, it's definitely wheat in the second.

Now, it is not scattering seeds in a field, it is a single seed that is planted, one seed. A man took a mustard seed, sowed it in his field. When I was a child, I probably told you this before, out in Southern California, my dad was stationed at Camp Pendleton, we lived on the banks of the base in Oceanside, Tan Your Hide in Oceanside, and in the parking area between the sidewalk and the street beyond our front yard, there were two trees that had been planted by the city, I guess the city planted them, but they were pepper trees.

And in the summer, they would fruit and all of these peppercorns would fall down into the parking and on the sidewalk and if you walked or rode your skateboard or your clip-on shoe skates, you'd mash those peppercorns and you could smell that pepper oil in the air during that period when they were falling from the tree and they were all different colors. I didn't know anything about pepper and I thought, well, this can't be real pepper because pepper is black and these things are orange and red and yellow and some of them are black and brown, but I thought, this, mom says this is a pepper tree, I don't really know what it is. But one thing that did impress me is those seeds were very small and round.

You've seen peppercorns, that's the size that these things were. And here are these, to my eye as a very young lad, quite substantial trees that grew from this little tiny peppercorn and it's one of the first times I thought about the difference between what's in a seed and what it produces by way of a tree. Well, you would only need one pepper tree to provide you a substantial amount of pepper if those trees are any guide.

If you'd been able to somehow harvest and gather all of those peppercorns, you could have not bought pepper for the next year. And that's evidently what's going on here. A man is going to plant a mustard seed, he's going to get a mustard tree, and the tree at some point is going to fruit and have a whole bunch of mustard seeds, but that's not the point of the parable.

Unlike the preceding two parables, it's not scattering a lot of seed, it's not involving a field or interference with the growth of the seed. There's a different point. Both of the preceding ones talked about something that is interfering or potentially interfering with the growth of the seed and the harvesting of its crop.

This is different. It's a seed a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds. What has been made out of this? Oh, a mustard is not the smallest seed.

There's other kinds of seed that are even smaller. It's a parable. It's a comparison.

Jesus is not conducting a science class. It is the smallest of any of the seeds that people in that area of the world at that time would think of planting in order to obtain a result. It's not technically the smallest seed in existence in the ancient Near East, etc.

This is the kind of nitpicking that the Pharisees engaged in, and while they were picking nits, the Messiah came and went. Look at the point of the parable. If you want to do science, go get a science textbook and do science.

It indeed is the least of all the seeds, by implication, least of all the seeds that one would think about planting to produce fruiting or a product that one desires in his own field. 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. The kingdom of heaven is like something that looks as though it has little to no potential.

Smallest of seeds. Jesus is going to refer to the mustard again one of these days. What's another saying you can think of? If you had faith as a grain of mustard, a grain, you could do powerful things, giant things being uprooted and cast into the sea.

If you had faith as a grain of mustard, just a small amount, but that mustard seed has been programmed by God and planted in the soil and cultivated, it produces this enormous tree greater than the herbs. But he doesn't say, and behold, he then provided mustard for the whole community. He had mustard in jars for the next three years.

What is the result of the growth of this tree? The birds of the air come and nest in its branches. In the context, when's the last time we had any reference to the birds of the air? Are they good or are they bad? Back to your first seed parable, verse four, chapter 13, as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside and the birds came and devoured them. Have you ever parked your car under a tree where the birds roost in its branches, nest in

its branches, make their home in its branches? Does the nesting of birds in your tree profit the owner in any way? No.

The birds of the air are generally, like leaven in scripture, not a good thing. It's one thing to have pigeons or turtle doves that are sacrificial, acceptable offerings, but there is something else at work when you talk about the birds of the air and they have just been used by the Lord Jesus as something negative. So, something small becomes something large.

It has an intended purpose, but it is subverted and turned to a different purpose by the birds of the air. They are now making their home in its branches. This wasn't the intention of the man who planted the seed.

This is what the kingdom is like and at first blush, if this is the millennial kingdom and it starts out as all believers, resurrected Old Testament saints, and is something that grows and prospers and is beneficial for one purpose, then you have birds of the air coming and nesting. And by the time it finishes, you have the presence of these birds. And isn't this what we are told is going to happen, Revelation chapter 20, that by the time the millennial kingdom comes to its close and has grown and children and so on have been raised to the point of maturity and have made their decision, there is an enormous number of those who will immediately follow Satan when he is released.

They are nesting in the branches. They are taking advantage of the presence and the shade and the protection that the tree offers, but they are not a part of the purpose of the man who sowed the seed. He is not a bird lover.

He sows mustard because he wants mustard, not birds. Birds making nests are going to fowl the tree. They are going to fowl the mustard that grows in the tree and so on.

So, what is the point of the parable? This is not one that Jesus specifically explains. So if we see that the kingdom is something that starts very small and grows very large, but then it becomes inhabited and there is intrusion into it, this is of a piece with the preceding parable that something enters in that isn't a part of the purpose of sowing the seed. Birds of the air, almost always in scripture, are like leaven, a sign of something bad that has intruded itself in.

One of the few times I can think of, other than sacrificial birds, are the birds that Noah released from the ark, the birds that fed Elijah at the brook Cherith. But you get the idea even there that as the birds of the air drop food to Elijah that his provision is coming sort of in spite of the fact that that's not what the birds want to do. That's not what they typically do.

And it is a reminder that God will conform even the fallen, evil, and cursed world into creating provision and sustaining His people even sort of against its wishes or against

what it would do if left to itself. And I like to think about the birds, the ravens that fed Elijah at the brook, because this isn't what they want to do, they're birds that want to feed themselves. But God makes them take care of His prophet in the same way that there's a lot in the secular world that God uses to sustain us.

And it may even be against the ideas and the purposes of those in the world, but God feeds us in spite of that ambition on their part. The birds are generally bad, and the birds are nesting in this tree. They didn't do it until it reached its fruition and its full growth.

And the time when these Gog-Magog birds are going to be nesting and roosting, and then suddenly they are going to turn and try to destroy the tree and take it over for themselves is I think a picture of the end of the millennial kingdom. So then you come to verse 33, another parable, He spoke to them. And by the way, what would the application of that be? Our faith may be small, but God can use it to grow large things that are beneficial not only to ourselves, but to others that provide shade, that provide many more potential mustard seeds, speaking the truth to one another in love, encouraging one another to love and good works, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

We're so blessed that we have that ministry twice a week. And these grains of faith seed are made available to us and can grow and be fruitful and meaningful and a blessing and a source of motivation and encouragement. But these things can be co-opted, they can be invaded, they can be corrupted and intruded into by things that are of the world.

I personally think this is what has happened to a lot of, just as an example, music ministries in churches. I think the birds of the air have come and nested in the branches of song and hymnology in the church and have taken it down a road that is unfruitful and counterproductive. That's just me, that's my personal choice of one application of this.

But as we think about this parable, what does it mean to me? I read this parable and I say, so what? I see the work of God in my life and in the lives of those near me, taking small things, just using the faithfulness of people to do things that they're not even aware of, that are much larger than they can realize or appreciate. But God is at work. It's not a perfect thing.

You can be used by God for wonderful purposes and yet it's a mixed blessing. There are still challenges, there are still birds nesting in the branches of this wonderful product of faith in the lives of believers. It's not a perfect world and many times our branches can get inhabited by things that aren't a part of God's purpose.

It doesn't say the man cut the tree down because the birds were keeping him up at night or disturbing his morning coffee or fouling his car parked underneath it. It just says that which is of the seed, that which starts small and grows large, can be intruded upon and have things come into it that are not a part of the purpose, not a part of the tree, nesting

in it, taking advantage of it, and in some ways seeking to diminish and corrupt it. But like the previous parable, let God handle when the ax is going to be laid to the root of the tree, what is going to be done.

Man cannot control the birds. We can domesticate many animals, but ask any city that's got bird problems and they'll tell you, man, it's almost impossible for us to control birds. When they flock, when they nest, where they choose to roost, very difficult to control.

It's out of our control. Leave that to the one who created the seed, who can cause the seed to turn into a tree. Let him deal with the birds.

Let him deal with the terrors. It's our job to grow, to be faithful, to be obedient. If things are going to get intruded, if things are going to be corrupted, there are times when we have a responsibility, as noted in the first session, to touch not the unclean thing, to be in the world but not of it, to not walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful.

But notice in Psalm 1, the counsel belongs to the ungodly and we don't go roost in their tree. We don't stand in the way that belongs to sinners and we don't sit in the chair that belongs to the scornful. We need to be a tree and if the scornful and the sinner and the ungodly are going to come roost in our tree, we leave that to God.

We don't go roost in their tree. We don't walk in their counsel. We don't stand in their way and we don't sit in their seat.

We do what we were designed to do. We are a seed. We're designed to grow.

If that results in some things cropping up in our branches, there's a time to purge that out and there's a time to let God handle it. And just focus on growth, focus on fruit, focus on hundredfold, not just 60, not just 30, one hundredfold production. And I'll do it in spite of the tears, in spite of the thorns, in spite of the rocks, in spite of any hard ground, in spite of whatever weeds might have been sowed into my particular part of the ground, I'm going to sink my roots deep.

I'm going to grow in spite of it and if there's a grasshopper sticking to my little piece of wheat, well he can just stay there. Wheat doesn't have the ability to deal with predators and insects and such, does it? Wheat doesn't have a little tendril like a snapdragon to come up there and get rid of things that are trying to eat it. That's a job for the one who sowed the seed, the one who tends the field.

And we need to commit many of these things to God and just concentrate on being faithful and growing. Verse 33, another parable he spoke to them, the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until it was all leavened. Your footnote there in the New King James will tell you this is about two pecks.

I've kind of forgotten, haven't seen anybody dealing in pecks and bushels in a while, but I think there's either two or four pecks in a bushel. This is a fair amount of meal, of basically when you put leaven in, this is dough. This is dough made from meal and it's a pretty big chunk.

And she takes a little pinch of leaven and as scripture says elsewhere, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. So we'll see this again in chapter 16 and verse 6. If you flip over there, Jesus says to them, take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Beware the leaven.

Leaven is like birds, almost always used in a negative sense in scripture. So if this woman is leavening the dough and a little bit of it spreads through the whole thing, this is another aspect of something intruding into that which starts out being all one thing. Unleavened bread is a picture of holiness.

Leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees comes into the unleavened meal, the unleavened dough and puffs it up, causes it to rise, fills it with pockets of gas. This is what makes bread puffy is the leaven, right? And the byproduct of leaven, the leaven is basically excreting and having gas. And that's what puffs up leavened bread.

So, people say, well, this is a good thing for my human purposes, but what we seek as the people of God is the bread from heaven. Jesus talks about this extensively in John chapter 6, I am the bread that comes down from heaven. This is the bread you should eat.

This is the bread that God gave his people. Manna didn't require leaven. They didn't make dough out of manna and then leaven it.

This is your earthly bread that grows from wheat that is planted in the cursed ground and by your sweat, you eat that bread. And that bread is inevitably leavened. But notice, we eat leavened bread.

We partake of it, even though it has this element that pictures that which is not of God, that which is not perfect, that which is not sanctified and holy. We celebrate with unleavened bread. The Passover was celebrated with unleavened bread, but leavened bread is a reality.

And a woman is going to hide leaven in this meal and it is going to leaven the whole lump. The kingdom of heaven is like this. It starts out being something that is unleavened, dedicated to God for God's purpose, but human purposes, the woman's intention for this unleavened meal is pictured in putting in the leaven.

This is going to make it better for me, the woman says. I'm going to be able to use this, it will stretch further, it will do more. And so the woman's purpose in leavening is accomplished and just a little bit spreads through the whole thing.

That's what the kingdom of heaven is like. Once again, the kingdom as it begins, when the Lord Jesus purges the earth after Armageddon and sets up the kingdom with the raised, resuscitated Old Testament saints, it's going to start out great. There's going to be very little by way of the presence and the influence of unbelievers at the beginning of the kingdom.

But there are those tears, there are those little bits of leaven and over time it spreads over time, its influence becomes greater. What is the application from the parable of the leaven? In our lives, if we tolerate a little bit of that which is not sanctified, that which is not to God's purpose, that which is not holy, it seems harmless, it seems like it's not a big deal, but the nature of leaven is that it multiplies itself. If we tolerate a little bit of a sin and that sin becomes a patterned sin, that pattern is going to grow.

It's like addiction, it's like the Lay's potato chip commercial of years gone by, nobody can eat just one. And it's one chip today, it's two chips tomorrow, it's four chips after that, eight, sixteen, it's like your ancestors. Pretty soon you go back, I calculated how many ancestors we would hypothetically have at thirty-six generations back, thirty-seven generations back.

Everybody is related to famous people. If you trace any of your lineages far enough back, you're related to somebody famous. So just on a whim I was following back one line of my ancestors.

My great-great-granddad was married to a lady named Mayberry, Emmeline Mayberry. And Emmeline, I've got a picture of her, she looks like a sweet lady, she died very young, she died before her parents or any of her siblings. And my great-great-grandfather ultimately remarried, but she was a sweet lady and my line descends through her.

Well I started tracing her back. That lady, you can trace her line all the way back to kings of France, kings of Brittany, and ultimately to Charlemagne. I can show you a direct line of ancestry all the way back to Charlemagne on two different branches.

And I thought, well, I wonder how related to Charlemagne I am. He's thirty-seven generations back. So put in thirty-five greats ahead of Charlemagne and he is my thirty-five greats grandfather.

So at that distance there are one hundred and thirty-seven billion other people. Not thousand, not million, billion. Just do the math, two to the thirty-seventh power is, I don't know, one hundred and thirty-something billion.

So is it significant? Absolutely not. But what it tells you is that if something begins to multiply, as you trace your ancestors back at every level they double, at every level they are squared, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, you know, they double, I think I said squared, they double. It's two times each time you go back.

So what's the point? We have to watch. There's always going to be sin in our lives. The nature of leaven is that it multiplies itself.

Tares were planted from seeds and each tare seed produces one tare. God says you're just going to have to put up with those tares until the harvest. But the tares are not multiplying.

Leaven multiplies. So there are some things by way of birds nesting in our branches or tares in the midst of our soil that we will tolerate and let God deal with. But the leaven is something different.

This is a spreading, metastasizing, multiplying presence. And I think what God is telling us here when he pictures the kingdom this way is, do you know why the lake of fire has been prepared for the devil and his angels? Do you know why those who follow Christ are in the sheep side of the judgment and those who follow Satan are on the goats side of the judgment? Do you want to know why that is? I'll tell you why. Because if they are not eliminated, they multiply.

This kind of evil is not static. It can't be tolerated because it spreads. This is the difference between a benign tumor and a malignant tumor.

Many times something that is benign will just be left in place. The surgery is more dangerous and disruptive. The thing is not going to hurt you.

It shouldn't be there. It's not proper to be in your body, but it's not spreading. The tares, the birds, non-spreading, non-malignant.

The leaven, this stuff gets worse over time. All of these are over time. The field is viewed over time.

The tree is viewed over time. The meal, the dough is viewed over time. If you see something progressing in the downward, sinful, evil direction, cut that thing out.

When Jesus talked about cutting off your hand and plucking out your eye, that's because that hand didn't just sin once. That eye didn't just cause you to sin once. It's doing it as a pattern.

And the only way to break the pattern is to eliminate the source. That's what I think this parable is teaching us. So, all these things, verse 34, Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables.

And without a parable he did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, and this center of the chiasm ties right back to the last in verse 14, the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled. Here, the prophecy is fulfilled. This is from the Psalms.

I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world. The nature of the millennial kingdom, the nature of all of the future kingdoms has been hidden.

The promise of the kingdom, you have some descriptions in the latter parts of the prophets. I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.

So, part of this is recognition of descriptions of the kingdom that are given in Ezekiel and in Isaiah and in some of the other prophets. Joel, about the ubiquitous nature of the Holy Spirit and so on. But the presence of evil in that coming promised kingdom was not revealed in the Old Testament.

God said, you Israelites have got problems now and you need to repent. You need to return. You need to be faithful and obedient so that this wonderful kingdom can be fulfilled.

That was the issue for them. He did not explain to them that, oh, by the way, even when I fulfill this kingdom, because you are not yet ultimately sanctified and because Satan has not yet been finally consigned to the lake of fire, that coming kingdom is itself going to have a limited duration. He said it's going to be a kingdom that has no end.

And he didn't explain the reason it has no end is it is going to transform. This is exactly like the life that Jesus describes in John 11, that the one who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And the one who lives and believes in me shall never die.

We have life eternal, even though we're going to die. The kingdom has no end, even though the millennial kingdom is going to come to an end. But the kingdom, as far as those who qualify for it, who enter into it, has no end.

The kingdom is going to change from the kingdom of the Son to the kingdom of the Father. The millennial kingdom has got three different names. It's the kingdom of the Son.

It's the kingdom of heaven. It's the kingdom of God. But it flows inevitably into the eternal kingdom of the Father in the new heavens and the new earth.

So it's not either or, it's both and. It has an end, but it doesn't have an end. Our life here has an end, but it doesn't have an end.

Read John 11. He that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. The one who lives and believes in me will never die.

Almost seems like a contradiction, but it makes sense when you realize that it's just like these parables. I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world. This is a

clarification.

It's a more granular look at the millennial kingdom. But it too is going to manifest in God's overarching design for history the fact that evil cannot be left to exist. It will inevitably metastasize.

It will inevitably corrupt. It will inevitably subvert. So when we look at our lives, we need to watch.

There are some things that are present. They're a part of the world. They're a part of sin and corruption.

But they are not gangrenous. They are not spreading and corrupting and making things worse. There are other things that must be chopped out, must be cut out, must be removed.

Because left in place, they will corrupt everything. Addictions are a prime example. How many people have lost everything because of various kinds of substance addiction or behavior addiction, whether it's gambling or promiscuity or whatever it may be? People have lost everything because they did not eliminate that at the beginning when it was small and easily removed.

And once it starts to grow, it's like the lump is inevitably leavened. Well, we're going to return next time and look at what Jesus says when he sends the multitudes away. Verse 36, Jesus sent the multitudes away, and he's going to reveal truth to those to whom it will be given.

Why is it given to them? Because they're not the multitudes who don't stick around, who are not interested, who are not asking and seeking and knocking. But Jesus will send the multitudes away. His disciples came to him saying, explain, please.

This is who we want to be. Lord, explain. I'm asking.

Ask, and it shall be given. We'll see that next time. But we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how powerfully it convicts us and guides us and helps us to set our priorities, to examine ourselves, to see if we're in the faith, to find those things that are inevitable, are beyond our control, that are a part of the enemy's work and that we must grow in spite of, and those things that are within our control that we can remove and prevent from spreading and corrupting our lives and choking the word and rendering it unfruitful. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will give us discernment and insight to make that distinction, to understand what is good, what is better, and what is best, what will enable us to be not just a 30-fold or a 60-fold field, but a 100-fold field.

And in the presence and power of your spirit and your word, that we can live a life that is pleasing in your sight and glorifies the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in his name. Amen.