

Episode #810 - Matthew 13 Part 4: Mustard, Leaven, and Tares

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. In Matthew 13, the Lord had taught the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares of the Field. Now, He was teaching the Parable of the Mustard Seed. This is another likeness of the kingdom of the heavens. A farmer sows a single grain of mustard seed in a field. This is far more sparing than normal, showing how he must prize this seed and be sure of its fertility.

III. The Parable of the Mustard Seed. Matthew 13:31-32.

A. Verse 31. A mustard seed is miniscule. The Lord planted a very small seed, just 120 men on Pentecost, yet it had grown to 3,120 by the end of that day, and it continued to grow. When God lifts His suspension of the kingdom, it will continue to grow until all other governments are put into the shade.

B. Verse 32. The first two parables were in harmony with the normal activities of men and of nature. Yet this parable is not! Are the birds the wicked one, like in the first parable, verse 19? No! Once a thing has been used as a figure, that does not mean it will always be used that way every time afterwards. Some things are inherently good or bad, but some things are neutral and can illustrate a thing good or bad. For example, Rev. 5:5, Christ is a lion, but in I Peter 5:8, the devil is a lion. Notice too that not every detail in a parable is significant, as can be seen from Christ’s interpretation of the parable of the growing grain, as the Lord in His interpretation gave no significance to the servants. These birds may well symbolize the trust men will place in the greatest of all kingdoms of the earth when God plants this kingdom.

IV. The Parable of the Leaven in the Meal. Matthew 13:33.

A. This was a key parable in the controversy between the pre and post millennialists. The post crowd insisted the leaven is the gospel, which they believed would eventually convert the world. The premillennialists insisted it is a likeness of Christendom, that the leaven stood for evil, the woman stands for evil workers, and that this evil would work subtly until all mankind was ripe for the wrath of God. One of the strongest points of this argument was that leaven is generally used as a symbol for something evil. The idea leaven signifies something evil is fixed in the minds of most premillennialists. Clearly leaven is used in some cases for something evil. Yet one simple question can clear this up: Is the kingdom of God something good or something evil? Luke 13:20-21 is parallel, and it compares the kingdom of God to leaven. If leaven is evil, then the kingdom of God is like something evil that, when it is placed in the earth, will permeate it until the whole becomes evil. Perish the thought! Impossible. Leaven is something that is known to work in a thing until it conforms that thing entirely to itself. Evil works that way, but this is not a symbol of something evil. God’s kingdom, with all His power behind it, works this way as well.

B. The woman is used to represent the Lord Jesus. It is not strange to Scripture that a woman would be used to symbolize a man. A woman is used because they were the ones who do the baking.

V. More About the Lord Using Parables. Matthew 13:34-35.

A. Verse 34. This does not mean that every word He spoke every time was a parable, but that he no longer spoke to them without using at least one parable in His exposition.

B. Verse 35. Again notice the word “fulfilled” or filled full does not necessarily indicate a prediction fulfilled, but that He acted in harmony with this prophecy. In Psalm 78:2, the psalmist (Asaph) is talking about what he is about to write in his psalm. He was not making a prophecy at all! Notice a psalmist is also called a prophet. Remember, a prophet is anyone who spoke God’s words. *Katabole* means “to cast down,” but down along certain lines, like casting metal in a foundry. This word does mean “foundation.” The “world” is a system, order, or arrangement, and does not mean “the earth.” The foundation of the world is not necessarily the creation of the earth. In this case it could mean the foundation of Israel, or of the world of mankind on earth with Adam. This phrase occurs 7 times, “before the foundation of the world” 3 times.

VI. Conclusion: The kingdom of heaven, God’s great future government, starts small like a mustard seed, but it is highly prized by God, and grows beyond all expectation into a great tree that all nations can trust in. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, so that when it is mixed into the earth, it conforms the whole world to its own character. The Lord spoke these parables, revealing secrets kept hidden since He had founded the world. Yet we have these secrets here.