

The Kingdom of Heaven
Matthew 13:24-43
Spoken by Pastor Andrew Huang
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OK, a little bit of context I think would be helpful. This parable is being taught at a time when people are wondering if Jesus is really a leader worth following. I mean, keep in mind, that before Jesus started his ministry John the Baptist was on the scene, and John the Baptist was saying all this stuff about Jesus, really hyping the people up-when he comes he's going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire! (imagine hearing that, and not exactly knowing what that means-like, do I want to be baptized by fire? Sounds kind of painful) With his winnowing shovel in his hand... no a win-win shovel is something that you use to separate wheat from chaff, so that is an image again of social and political change, for sure. And so the people were expecting these sweeping revolutionary political changes.

But then 10 chapters later, you don't really see these sweeping revolutionary changes. Actually, it can be argued, that there's only been a little bit of change. Before Jesus came you had a society of bad people doing bad things and now 10 chapters... nothing has changed. And so people are thinking what is going on?

I mean is Jesus really the Messiah? And I thought that he was going to do this, and I thought that this was going to happen, but that didn't happen. And so there is some missed expectations.

And I'm just wondering if there are people here today and you have some of those missed expectations.

You thought life was going to go a certain way and you thought life was going to go a certain way and it really didn't go that way.

Or maybe maybe you always thought that by a certain age your life was going to go in a certain way and now you're at that age, and you're like didn't happen. Or at least, not the way I was expecting.

And so it's in the middle of these missed expectations that Jesus gives the teaching in chapter 13.

No in this chapter Jesus covers eight parables. This morning we are not going to cover eight parables, we're going to cover two. And for each of these parables it has the same opening line, which is-the kingdom of heaven is... in fact, in this chapter alone he says the kingdom of heaven at least seven times. Which makes me think that we should probably explain what he means by that. You know, for a long time this was kind of a mystery to me. I remember studying the Gospel of Mark in college with a group and this question came up over and over again, what is the kingdom of heaven? And no one knew. It was like this big mystery. And then one day our teacher said well what do you need for a kingdom? And we said a king and people. And so we kind of shrugged her shoulders and said OK let's use that as a working definition. But just to say a king and his people is not a very satisfying working definition. Because at some point you want to know what the relationship is between the king and his people. Which led me to keep on looking for a better definition and I think I have one now. In this sort of explains the relationship between a king and his people. So this is the best definition I have of the kingdom of God. Here it is: the kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God. That seems to make a lot more sense to me than just seen King and his people. It's what happens when God comes into a person's life. It's what happens when a person receives God's forgiveness, and God fills them with the Holy Spirit and then there is this love relationship that begins. That's what the kingdom of heaven means.

OK so now let's go into this before we do the me explain one more thing. Parables. How do you understand a parable? Well, a lot of scholars say that the wrong way to understand a parable is to take away like five different points. A lot of scholars believe most parables have one driving point, and that one driving point is the message that we need to think about and apply. So for these three parables I'm really just looking for the main driving point and so when we read them I want you to be thinking what is the main driving point. OK here we go...

The Parable of the Weeds

24 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds[c] among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants[d] of the 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?' 28 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?’ 29 But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

The Parable of the Weeds Explained

36 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.” 37 He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

OK what is the one main driving point from this parable? Well, I think it's hard to deny. You have good seed and they're doing their thing, and you have bad seed and they are doing their thing, but they're all respectively in the same place, and you sort of wonder where all this is going. And there is this dialogue that happens about well why are the good seed mixed with the bad seed, but now that it is what it is, we should wait so that good seed can reveal itself and bad seed can reveal itself but then this story is all moving towards a final climax, which I think is really the main point of the story. I think the main point is there is a day of future judgment. It's a terrifying day for people who reject God and live for themselves, but it is going to be a day of amazing celebration for people who accept God and live for his glory. And so that I think is the main idea-there is a future day of judgment.

You guys, here's the thing, here's the thing, I don't know, but for some reason we don't think about this. Nobody talks about this. You would think that in the church we would talk about this, but we don't talk about this. I think our culture teaches us to live in the present, live in the now, Yoda said- "All his life has he looked away... to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was...hmmm?"

And I know I've used this illustration before, but this just such a powerful illustration. I think the first time I used it I used a hose and I didn't know that it still had water in it so I stretched it out and it started leaking onto the carpet.

So let me abbreviate this illustration for you. You guys this is the timeline of our lives. The beginning of this rope is the day we were born. Right now we are about right here in our lives. And this is what a lot of Christians do. They go.

I don't know when Jesus is coming back, it's probably going to be out there sometime...sometime... sometime after I die. I don't want to sound too confident about that, So Probably. So you know I have time. You sure about that? I mostly think so. Or you know honestly, we don't even think about it.

We go that seems so far away right now, it just doesn't seem to be relevant.

Because all we can think about is the here and the now of this life, right? Taxes, health, and my schooling, and my boss, and these pressures I'm having and stuff, we get caught up in the here and now.

And then Jesus breaks out this parable. We need to live each day with the end in mind.

And now let me move my finger like two feet down this rope and this is the day of judgment. And people who have rejected God and live for themselves I want to be sensitive but totally honest about what the scripture says here. Jesus doesn't hold back. He says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, he uses the words "blazing furnace" will have an eternity without him which is a blazing furnace, but let me just explain a little bit here, that the worst part about it is that you spend an eternity without a trace of God. But for people who have received God's forgiveness and have lived for his glory and how cool is this? No I really like how the text in just a few words describes heaven, but other places in the scripture describe heaven as this amazing celebration, it's like this amazing feast, but here the description is a little bit different and it says that we are so filled with the glory and the radiance and the beauty of God that we will "shine like the sun"!

You guys, don't you see, like how powerful this teaching is. Like if this day did not exist, and eternity did not exist, then sure when you're living this part right here, do whatever you want to do, because in a fact it doesn't really matter. If things get hard, just give up. Or

don't tell me it doesn't really matter. But if there is such a day and all of this life is going somewhere, then how we live from day to day matters and every decision we make matters because of this day. Jesus is calling his people to live every day and to make every decision with the end in mind. Such a powerful thought.

Now let me just break this down for you and be as practical as I can with you.

So you guys a lot of times when we make decisions we ask the wrong questions. Art question sometimes is can I be a Christian and still do blank?

So we go-I can be a Christian and not go to church all the time right? Sure. I can be a Christian not really tithe or be baptized? Sure. can I be a Christian and not really like actively disciple my kids right? Sure. Can I be a Christian and still really want the corner office right? I can be a Christian and have my kids enrolled in this and that and this right? Sure

But I think we're asking the wrong question.

Shouldn't the question be for every decision we make; shouldn't the question be yes I could but is this going to best prepare me for that day? That should be the question. Can my kids can be Christians and super successful? Yes, but is doing that really going to best prepare them for that day?

This parable and this question that Jesus asks is a game changer. It has so much power to change everything you do in the here and now. In fact Jesus might say to Yoda that it's not bad for Luke to look into the future because it gives him power and clarity in the present.

Just imagine what your life would look like if you really lived this out!

If you measured every decision not can I be a Christian and still blank but will this thing will this event will this decision best prepare me for that day?

OK I have about 10 more minutes and I would like to cover the two more parables that really come as a couple. They're meant to be read together because they're so similar and yet at the same time they're different. And I think you're supposed to notice the similarity, and then also notice the difference and so the difference might be a main point within a main point. Let me show you what I mean.

The Mustard Seed and the Leaven

31 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has 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."

33 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."

OK so how are these two parables the same? They both start off saying the kingdom of heaven is like this. And so remember we explained what that phrase means it means the redemptive reign of God is like this or in other words when God comes in to a persons life or a communities life this is what happens... It starts small like a mustard seed, like a bit of leaven, which is another word for yeast, but then he gets really big and has a big effect. Is that sound good? OK but then what's the difference between these two parables? Well I think if you take a closer look you see that the first parable is external you see the small seed and then you see it become pretty big with birds nesting in its branches. But the second one seems more internal.

Let me try to illustrate this for you.

Here you have some dough, flour and water and Lynn who prepare this for me. And now here comes the leaven. Not a lot just a little bit. Now I'll be honest with you this is the first time I've ever done this. And so I'm not exactly sure I know what happens exactly when you mix these together. Now I know enough that when she put yeast in you have to kneed it, and pound it, now in real life you probably do this a lot longer I don't know, but it is demonstration I think 20 seconds is really about enough. Now this is where I need a real life commentator and here's what we're going to do. I want you to take this magnifying glass and look very closely at the constitution of this

dough and tell me in real time what you see happening. Ready... Go. What do you see happening. I give another five seconds. Why do you see happening now. OK give it another five seconds what about now what about now. Imagine me doing this for the next five hours every five seconds what about now.

OK so let's put this together what is the driving point of these two parables? Number one when God comes into your life it's starts small, you might not see much happening right away, but give it time, and God goes internal, and He permeates every facet of your heart.

OK what does that mean?

A lot of you are invested in the things of God maybe you're a little bit disappointed with the progress. And the word for you is that God's work doesn't happen overnight, some of his best stuff takes time because He's transforming the heart.

I think back on the context of this parable. Remember people were expecting political revolution, and here Jesus through this parable is in effect saying no no no, I am doing something far better than that than just something superficial or external I am changing people from the inside out. I'm giving people a new heart I'm filling people with the Holy spirit, I am forgiving people their sins and everything about their lives is going to change from the inside out.

Once I was talking to a leader in our church. I'll just tell you who it was, it was Sharon who recently went to be with the Lord. But one time I was talking to her and she shared with me that she used to struggle in her marriage. And I was surprised by this because I always thought that her and Kevin had such a strong marriage, but I guess it didn't start off that way. So I asked her what happened? And she said well I started to read the Bible and I started to study the scripture and got the word convicted me and slowly slowly I started to change in our marriage started to change.

When God comes into a persons life he changes people from the inside out. It's not just external, it's not superficial, but you're different inside. Your values change, your motivations change, your desires change, what you live for changes. It's still the new year and my encouragement to you is to live every moment with the end in mind and let God continue to change your heart.