

May 24, 2009

**THE PUZZLING AND GROWING KINGDOM
MATTHEW 13.24-43**

1. THE KINGDOM AND TARES (24-30, 36-43)

The setting (24, 36): Speaking from the sea until he explains the parable of the tares. Moves back to the house with disciples alone. They are the new “house” of Israel to whom the mysteries of the kingdom are being revealed.

Sowing and seeds: Common to speak about “return from exile,” but the metaphor runs deeper than this to death and resurrection. Cf. Ezek 37 and dry bones for how resurrection = return from exile.

Seeds must die in order to be raised to new life and be fruitful; cf. Jn 12.24; 1Cor 15.36ff.

These parables normally viewed as Jesus being the *beginning* of the story and the kingdom being future from that point forward. This is true. But it is not the only way to look at these.

Parable can also be viewed with Jesus as the *end* of the story. Jesus is the culmination of the story of Israel.

Does not rule out the future aspect. History follows discernable patterns from which we learn about how God has acted and thus *will act* in the future. Cf. e.g. 1Cor 10; Heb 3–4

Parables about harvest indicate that this is speaking in part of the 1st c. situation. Note Jesus’ words in Mt 9.37-38 and then sending the disciples/angels into the harvest in ch. 10. Note also the parable of the tenant farmers in Mt 21.23-44 in which the Son comes at the end of the story and is put to death. Indicates transition from old world/OC to new world/NC.

Jesus is the *omega* and the *alpha* of these parables. He is the last, the end, and the first.

The kingdom of heaven: = God’s manifested rule in the world in which he sets his people up as rulers together with him so that the world experiences restoration, healing, and comes to its intended end of peace. The effects of sin are reversed, and God’s purpose for creation is realized. God’s justice ruling the world. Everything is put right; i.e. the way it ought to be.

The Sower and his field: Jesus as the *end* of the story. God scattered the seed of Israel throughout the world in the Babylonian exile. Some seed was planted back in the land to rebuild the temple. The devil planted evil tare-seed among the wheat. Up until now they have grown together. Now is time for the harvest.

Angels = messengers. They can be human or spirit beings. Cf. Rev 2–3 where angel = pastor. (Cp also Mt 24.31)

This is the time for separating tares and wheat. That separation occurs through the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom and is determined by who responds in loyalty to Jesus and who does not.

The “close of the age” (39) = close of old creation/OC age (cf. 1Cor 10.11). Through biblical eyes this was “the end of the world.”

Jesus as the *beginning*: pattern for what is leading up to that great Day of the Lord. Jesus is sowing new seed; i.e. his disciples. He scatters them throughout the world, which is “his field” (38). Jesus will make it clear in Mt 28.18-20 that this world is both his field and that his disciples are to be scattered throughout the entire world being fruitful, making disciples.

Tares are still planted among the wheat. There will be a final harvest in which the two are separated and the tares will be cast into hell and the righteous will “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Dan 12.3).

“Shining as the sun” = ruling the world. Sun, moon, and stars are set up as rulers on the 4th day (Gen 1.18). We are seated with Christ in heavenly places (i.e. the firmament) to rule (Eph 2.6).

- 1) The field, which is the world, is *his* field.
- 2) The ministry of harvest is a continual ministry of the church.
- 3) All of this looks forward to the final day of the Lord when all will be finalized.

2. THE KINGDOM AND MUSTARD SEED (31-32)

Jesus as the *end*: “least of all the seeds” reminds us of Israel being “least of all people” (Dt 7.7). God planted them (cf. Ps 80; Ezek

17.23) and they became a tree which grows up into its fullness in Jesus.

Cf. also Daniel 4: Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a tree. This tree provides protection and provision for the birds of heaven (Dan 4.12). But the tree is cut down. Jesus is the true Nebuchadnezzar.

Jesus as the *beginning*: Jesus takes a remnant from Israel, plants them, they become a great tree in which the nations find rest.

- 1) Once again, this seed is planted in *his* field (31).
- 2) The organic nature of the kingdom: The kingdom is not something that comes all at once in its fullness. It begins small and *grows*; sometimes imperceptibly, but surely.
- 3) Ultimately this kingdom will be the greatest tree in the world.

3. THE KINGDOM AND LEAVEN (33)

Jesus as the *end*: Israel has been leaven for the world. Now the lump of dough is ready to be put into the oven to become bread.

Imagery from Pentecost/Weeks where two leavened loaves waved before God and eaten by worshipers. Marked the end of the wheat harvest and a “conclusion” to Passover/Unleavened Bread.

At Passover the old leaven from Egypt had been cut off and Israel was to be a new lump, made with new leaven from the new land. Jesus ministry is the culmination of this. The leavened dough is now ready to be baked and become food for God and man.

Jesus as the *beginning*: In Jesus’ ministry he and his bride, the church, are “hiding” leaven in this great lump of dough, the world.

Leaven may = teaching (cf. Mt 16.12). Teaching of Jesus and apostles regarding the kingdom. What does this teaching involve?

Leaven is “corruption” of some kind. Could never be offered on the altar (Lev 2.11). Jesus is certainly speaking of leaven as a catalyst that permeates the whole lump of dough causing it to rise. But this might also have some allusion to the scandal of the nature of the kingdom that Jesus is proclaiming and embodying.

Note the “corrupt” people that are making up the kingdom (9.9-13; 11.19; cf. also Mt 21.31-32). Jesus is making a loaf out of the “corrupt” but it will turn out to be a loaf upon which God and man may feast.

- 1) The leaven is hidden but it eventually permeates the whole lump of dough.
- 2) This parable emphasizes that one aspect of the nature of the kingdom is that the whole world will become food for God and man to enjoy together.

4. THE KINGDOM AND PARABLES (34-35)

Psa 78.2 using his own translation: “I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.” (35)

Ps 78 begins this way and then tells the story of Israel and her rebellions in the wilderness and at Shiloh. In the end God comes to deliver his people and set up David to rule over them.

Jesus has been revealing what has been hidden (“mysteries”). These are hidden from those who reject him, but they are given/revealed to those who are following him (as indicated in the explanation of the parable that follows this).

- 1) Jesus is telling the story of Israel once again. He is doing just what the Psalm does. He is revealing what God has done for Israel throughout her history in showing compassion and yet they reject him time after time.
- 2) Jesus is telling the story of Israel once again with himself as the conclusion. Israel has not received the message, but God has been compassionate; a compassion finally revealed in the fact that Jesus has come and will arise to defeat the enemy and be set up as King.

1. *Be patient!*

2. *Be assured!*