

# THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE WHEAT SURROUNDED BY WEEDS, LIKE A MUSTARD SEED AND LIKE LEAVEN

1 Kings 4:20-34; Matthew 13:24-52

- ❖ He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. 34 Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom. (1 Kings 4:33-34)
- ❖ “The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:42)

## I. FARMING, AGRICULTURE AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

- A. The Kingdom of God is one of the main themes of Matthew’s Gospel.
1. The first words of John the Baptizer in Matthew’s Gospel were, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:2)
  2. In the third and last temptation, Jesus is offered the “kingdoms of the world and their glory” (Mt.4:8).
  3. The Kingdom was central to the preaching of Jesus.
  4. The parables of Matthew 13 explain what the “kingdom of heaven” is like.
    - a. “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field...” (v.24)
    - a. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...” (v.31)
    - b. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven...” (v.33)
    - c. “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field...” (v.44)
    - d. “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking find pearls...” (v.45)
    - e. “The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea...” (v.47)
- B. We shouldn’t miss the simplicity & irony of Christ’s teaching about the kingdom of heaven!
1. Kingdom of *heaven* – seed sowed in a *field* (v.24)
  2. Kingdom of *heaven* – mustard seed sowed in a *field* (v.31)
  3. Kingdom of *heaven* – *leaven* hidden in flour (v.33)
- C. If Jesus hadn’t done it, we might think that it might was profane to take about such profound, heavenly and glorious truths in the most mundane, routine, and earthy ways!

“Josephus [the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish historian] explicitly says Judeans in Palestine were primarily agricultural. Comparative studies suggest that 80–90 percent of the populace in Jesus’ day regularly engaged in agricultural work. The elite 5 percent of the population—rulers, soldiers, scribes, administrators, and so on—did not regularly do agricultural work. These had to be fed from the labors of those who did and needed to defend or justify such arrangements” (Hanson & Oakman, *Palestine in the time of Jesus: Social structures and social conflicts* p.104).

## II. THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43; cf. Psalm 28)

- A. Many Jews in Jesus’ day were under the misconception that when the Messiah came He would immediately separate the righteous from sinners. They thought that when Messiah came all evil doers would be cast into hell (Matthew 3:12).
- B. In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus is saying that the final distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous comes at the end of the Messianic Age and not at the beginning. From the time of Jesus’ first coming 2,000 years ago until the time of His future return there will always be righteous and unrighteous people living side by side.

### III. THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED (Matthew 13:31-32//Mark 4:30-34//Luke 13:18-19; cf. Ezek.31:2-6)

- A. The parable of the mustard seed also challenged the Jewish view of how the kingdom of God would begin. Jews thought the kingdom would begin big. Jesus says that it is just the opposite!
- B. It's impossible to explain the benefits, blessings, and influence that true biblical Christianity has had in the world for the last 2,000 years.
  1. In ancient Greco-Roman culture it was common to kill infant children.
  2. Christianity has elevated sexual morality.
  3. Women have been given freedom and dignity.
  4. In the ancient Greco-Roman world pagans did not generally take care of their sick. In contrast, the Christians took care of the dying and ignored the danger to themselves.
  5. Belief in hell and judgment are very important for a nation's economy.
  6. Businesses are learning that a person's private life does affect their public life! It turns out that many top executives accused of betraying the trust of shareholders also betrayed the trust of their wives.

Harvard scholars came out with a research paper appearing in the October 2003 issue of *American Sociological Review*. After analyzing and collecting data in 59 countries between 1981 and 1999 they came to the conclusion that religion is more important to the economic well being of a nation than investment, savings rates, worker productivity, and wage scales. "Our central perspective is that religion affects economic outcomes mainly by fostering religious beliefs that influence individual traits such as honesty, work ethic, thrift and openness to strangers." Citation: Felicia R. Lee, *New York Times*, "Research links religion to economic development" Published February 8, 2004

### IV. THE PARABLE OF LEAVEN (Matthew 13:33//Luke 13:20-21)

leaven (Matthew 13:33) – fermented dough (not yeast). When making leavened bread, a woman would use a piece of fermented dough from a previous batch. The dough was then placed in the new lump of unfermented dough and allowed to slowly permeate through the new lump until the entire lump was changed. Leaven in the Scriptures is symbolical of permeating influence. Sometimes that influence can be good and other times it can be bad (cf. Mark 8:15; Galatians 5:9).

"This is no slip of a girl making two tiny loaves for her husband's pleasure. This is a *baker*, folks. Three measures . . . is a bushel of flour. . . . That's 128 cups! That's 16 five-pound bags! And when you get done putting in the 42 or so cups of water you need to make it come together, you've got a little over 101 pounds of dough on your hands." (Robert F. Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 118 [italics his] quoted in Mark L. Bailey in "The Parable of the Leaven" *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 156* pp.64f.).

- **The kingdom grows when Christians live as the salt of the earth and the light of the world and when Christians practice a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees (see Matthew 5-7).**

## QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

*Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer.*

*Retell the parable of the wheat and tares, mustard seed, and leaven in your own words to someone else (If you need to, reread the parable and then close your Bible).*

*What is the irony of Jesus talking about the kingdom of heaven in agricultural terms?*

*What is/are the main idea(s) of the parable of the wheat and tares?*

*What are some of the benefits and blessings that Christianity has been to your life and to the life of your family? How has Christianity been a blessing to our nation?*

*How is your family better off because of Christianity? How is your workplace a better place because of your being "salt and light"? How is our country better because of the influence of Christianity?*

*How does the Kingdom grow and how does the influence of Christianity spread?*

