

Matthew 13C

- Welcome back to Kingdom Program 101, Jesus' training course for His disciples
 - The Kingdom Program is the Church's mission
 - It's our program of recruiting men and women to become citizens of the Kingdom by placing their faith in Jesus
 - So that in a day to come when Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom on earth, all citizens will enter together with Him
 - This plan is so different from what Jesus' followers expected Jesus to establish at His first coming
 - They anticipated that the Messiah's arrival meant Israel would receive that literal, physical Kingdom in their day
 - And had Israel accepted Jesus' proposal, the Kingdom would have been theirs in that day
 - But Israel refused the Kingdom proposal so Jesus withdrew His offer and in its place, He initiated this program
 - And He spent the final months of His earthly life training them on their new unexpected mission
 - And in this chapter Matthew introduces Jesus' shift in dramatic fashion with seven parables about the Kingdom
 - The parables are coded messages intended only for the disciples, since it involves Kingdom work that only Jesus' disciples can do
 - We play a part in building a spiritual Kingdom, a strange, unexpected, mysterious movement of the Spirit we call the Church
 - It's people around the world called out of darkness, responding in faith to a Jesus they've never seen
 - For those early disciples, this was a mind-blowing shift in how God worked, and if you think about it...it's still mind-blowing
- So the seven parables in this chapter kick off Jesus' training program in dramatic fashion, and we started last week with the first of these parables

- The Sower and Seed parable, as it's usually called, explains how the Kingdom program will spread and what will propel it
 - The word of God is Christ's tool to move the Kingdom call outward
 - The farmer in the parable distributes seed without reservation, without limits
 - And wherever it lands, it produces a result according to His purposes

[Is. 55:9](#) "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
 So are My ways higher than your ways
 And My thoughts than your thoughts.

[Is. 55:10](#) "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
 And do not return there without watering the earth
 And making it bear and sprout,
 And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;

[Is. 55:11](#) So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
 It will not return to Me empty,
 Without accomplishing what I desire,
 And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- The Lord's word yields a variety of response in the hearts of the world
 - Some will respond in faith while others will not and we're not charged with fixing that problem...for it is not a problem at all
 - Jesus' point wasn't that the farmer should improve his sowing method so as to harvest more
 - Jesus was speaking directly to that plant that fails to produce fruit in response to receiving the word of God
- Christians need to make a goal of living up to the expectations that come with our faith
 - Jesus expects us to join the work of the Kingdom Program
 - We're expected to produce a crop much greater than just ourselves...we should seek to multiply a hundred fold

- Those Christians who do not produce fruit in this way are Condition 3 Christians
 - As Luke wrote, they are those choked off by the worries and riches and pleasures of this life and so failed to reproduce
 - This isn't what Jesus expects of us...He says no one lights a lamp only to cover it over with a blanket
 - In other words, the Lord didn't place His light in us by His Spirit so that we could hide it behind a fleshly, worldly lifestyle
 - Instead, we must let our light shine before men in such a way that they might see our good works and glorify our Father Who is in Heaven
- That was the first thing Jesus wanted His disciples to understand...but it's only the first thing
 - That leads us to our second lesson in the Kingdom program, found in our next parable...

[Matt. 13:24](#) Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

[Matt. 13:25](#) "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away.

[Matt. 13:26](#) "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

[Matt. 13:27](#) "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'

[Matt. 13:28](#) "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?'

[Matt. 13:29](#) "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.

[Matt. 13:30](#) 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

- Jesus uses a similar setting for His second parable, so it's only natural to assume that the symbolism carries over from the first parable
 - One again we have a story of sowing seed, but this time the landowner is central to the storyline

- The man's servants sow his field with good seed
- Then while the man's servants were sleeping overnight, an enemy enters the land and begins to sabotage the field
- The enemy of the landowner sowed tares in the same field alongside the wheat plants
- The Greek word used for tare is *zi'-za-nion*, which means darnel
 - A darnel is a type of European rye grass, and when a darnel first sprouts it looks exactly like new shoots of wheat
 - Obviously the enemy of the landowner wanted to ruin the man's crop by sowing confusion, literally
 - By planting grass in the field, the enemy wanted to introduce competition for resources leading to a reduction in the crop
 - The grass growing next to the wheat would rob the wheat of water and nutrients from the field to choke it off
 - It reminds us of the third condition in our earlier parable
- In v.27 the slaves awake to notice the rye grass growing in the field
 - So they ask their master how this could be so...that is, how could there be bad plants coming up in the master's good field?
 - The master explains that an enemy had entered his field at night to sow the tares
 - So the slaves offer to go out and remove the bad plants from the field
 - But the master quickly objects reminding the slaves that the tares are identical to the wheat
 - The master says the slaves would inevitably make mistakes
 - They might pull up the wrong plant, which would only further reduce the master's production of wheat
 - The landowner was willing to let the tares share the field for a time though it may reduce production somewhat
 - At least every wheat plant survives, and in time, the tares and wheat would be clearly known

- At harvest time, the wheat plants would mature to the point of producing seed but the grass never would
- So at the harvest, the wheat plants can be identified easily, taken out of the field and preserved in the master's barn
- While the tares will be removed and burned
- That's our second parable, and as with our first parable, it says something about the nature of the Kingdom program
 - Notice in v.24 Jesus says that the Kingdom program may be compared to a man sowing a field with good seed
 - So based on these two parables, we can already see that the Kingdom will be a program of sowing, growing and harvesting
 - In literal terms, it's a program of recruiting new citizens for the Kingdom by sowing the word of the Kingdom or the Gospel
 - And that program will be opposed by a powerful enemy intent on limiting production
 - Like the first parables, Jesus' disciples couldn't fully understand this parable, so they ask Jesus for an explanation in private
 - That request comes in v.36, and it's followed by Jesus' interpretation
 - But before that moment, Jesus gives us two more parables that build on His teaching of sowing and growing
- So let's look at those additional parables before making sense of this one

[Matt. 13:31](#) He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;

[Matt. 13:32](#) and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

[Matt. 13:33](#) He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

- In v.31 Jesus sticks with an agricultural motif, but this time it's a mustard plant
 - Mustard is an herb and there are a variety of mustard in the world

- The kind of mustard native to the Middle East grows considerably taller than any other herb
- It towers as much as 10 feet tall which makes a mustard plant like a tree compared to other garden herbs
- It's so large that birds will make nests in its branches
- But the seed of the mustard plant is quite small, about the size of a BB
 - And it's that contrast between the mustard seed's modest beginning and its impressive finish that form Jesus' focus
 - The mustard plant's small-to-great transformation characterizes an aspect of the Kingdom, but which aspect?
 - Once again, it's not immediately clear what Jesus is saying here
- But Jesus teaches a companion parable in v.33 to help us understand His point
 - He says the kingdom can be compared to leaven or yeast that a woman "hid" in three pecks of flour until it was completely leavened
 - The scene here is very different than the previous three parables but the contrast is similar
 - Yeast is a microscopic plant, and when it's activated by the warmth and moisture of the dough, it begins to reproduce
 - As it does, it gives off carbon dioxide gas causing dough to expand and rise
 - Eventually, the yeast reaches to every part of the dough causing the entire lump to rise
 - So what was small and initially hidden soon spread to every corner and made its presence known
 - So like the mustard plant, this parable starts with something small, insignificant and almost invisible: yeast in dough
 - And like the mustard plant, we end with a disproportionately large outcome in the end
 - As the yeast spreads to every part of the dough it causes all of it to rise thereby making its presence known
- So we have three parables about the nature of the Kingdom program

- The meaning of each may not be perfectly clearly, though we may think we know what Jesus was talking about...and perhaps we do
 - But if so, it's probably because we have 2,000 years of history helping us make sense of them
 - But imagine yourself in the disciples' shoes, to say nothing of the crowds...they were mystified
- And again, this was intentional...as Jesus repeats in the next short passage

Matt. 13:34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable.

Matt. 13:35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

**“I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES;
I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.”**

- As I mentioned last week, Jesus only spoke to the crowds in parables after His rejection
- Never again would the crowds hear Jesus declaring spiritual truth in the open
- Matthew says this was to fulfill the prophecies spoken in the Psalms, which promised Israel the Lord would come to them speaking parables
 - Ironically, Jesus spoke to a hard-hearted Israel in parables so that they would *not* understand spiritual truth
 - And yet, speaking in parables was itself another sign to prove to Israel that Jesus *was* their Messiah
- So now let's stitch together the meaning of these parables, beginning with Jesus' explanation of the first

Matt. 13:36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”

Matt. 13:37 And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,

Matt. 13:38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;

Matt. 13:39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels.

- Here again we see the disciples struggling to follow Jesus' teaching, so they ask for an explanation
 - And Jesus gladly gives them the answer, which tells us that Jesus wasn't trying to confuse His followers with these stories
 - He wants us to understand them and by the Spirit, we can
 - And as with His first parable, Jesus' explanation begins with the most important detail
 - In the Sower and the Seed, Jesus opened with the seed was the word of God
 - As that seed falls on hearts around the world, it produces a variety of results
 - Sometimes it produces new life, other times it won't
 - Sometimes that new life produces fruit, sometimes it won't
 - And now in this parable Jesus emphasizes that the One who sows is Jesus Himself
 - Specifically, the Lord sows good seed, which are sons of the Kingdom (believers), while the enemy sows bad seed (unbelievers)
 - Jesus has taken the focus of His first parable and narrowed it down, essentially zooming into Conditions 3 & 4
 - In the Sower & the Seed, Jesus prepared His disciples to understand that the Kingdom program won't reach everyone
 - And now He's explaining why even among those who receive the Gospel some will not produce fruit
- Furthermore, this parable introduces the idea of a season of time, a period in which the Kingdom program will operate on earth (i.e., in the "field")
 - Jesus says that the growing must continue uninterrupted until the harvest time
 - And harvest time is a common picture in the Bible of the return of Christ and the judgment He brings to earth

- We see that clearly here as Jesus says in v.39 the end of this age is represented by the harvest
- An age in the Bible is a long, finite period of history
 - An age has a beginning and an end defined by major world events dictated by God
 - And as an age comes to an end, a new age will begin
- The book of Daniel and others tell us that our current age will end when Christ returns to earth
 - And the next age to follow is the age of the literal Kingdom of Jesus on earth
 - So in this parable, Jesus says the harvest represents that moment when He returns to rule and the present age ends
- At that time, Jesus says He will direct His angels to harvest, that is to separate the wheat from the tares in the field
 - Or in other words, at the end of this age the believers and unbelievers on earth will be completely separated
 - For the first time in history, those who are truly God's and those who are not will be fully known for Christ will make it clear
- Notice how Jesus describes that moment:

[Matt. 13:40](#) "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.

[Matt. 13:41](#) "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,

[Matt. 13:42](#) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[Matt. 13:43](#) "Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

- The moment Jesus is describing here takes place at the very end of this age, literally as this age is ending and the next begins
 - At that time, the earth will be in utter turmoil

- It will have reached the end of a seven-year period of supernatural judgments unequalled by anything the world has ever seen
- Before that time, the Church will have been removed from the earth while most of those who remained have died in the judgments
- We will learn much more about these circumstances in Matthew 24 (and the upcoming Revelation course)
- Those who remain will be clearly divided into God's people and the enemy's forces, and they will be engaged in a great war
 - And into the chaotic devastation, a light will appear out of the darkness
 - Jesus says He returns to earth in glory bringing with Him His angels, who will carry out His judgment on the unbelieving
- Then and only then will the sons of God and the sons of the devil be fully known and separated
 - But until that time, the two worlds will coexist, and in fact they will be difficult if not impossible to tell apart at times
 - A person's heart can't be fully known...only by their fruit can we gain a limited understanding of their heart
 - And the full measure of that fruit will not be evident until the end of the age
 - In the meantime, these two worlds will mix but will not find common ground, and so spiritual warfare will be the norm
- And I'm sure for Jesus' disciples this would have been the most surprising revelation in this parable
 - Put yourself in the shoes of a first century Jew for a moment
 - For a Jew living prior to Christ, the spiritual "haves" and "have-nots" of the world were always distinct and easy to recognize
 - Jews were God's people and Gentiles were dogs, they believed, and there was no confusing one for the other
 - But now Jesus was saying that God's children and Satan's children would be hard to distinguish

- Not only would these two groups be hard to identify within the world, they may even rub elbows inside our congregations
- Remember back in Matthew 7 Jesus said that not all who proclaim “Lord, lord” will be found in Heaven
- Just as tares look very much like wheat, at least at first, unbelievers can mimic the claims and behaviors of Christians
- But you find the main point of this parable in v.29 when the Master says do not uproot the wheat
 - Remember, the problem with having tares in the field is that it chokes off production of the wheat
 - And for that reason, under normal circumstances a farmer wouldn’t hesitate to remove weeds from his field
 - While he might lose a few wheat plants in the process, the overall effect would be to gain a greater harvest
- But in this parable, the Master adamantly refuses to allow his servants to remove the weeds...and why?
 - Because the Master was unwilling to lose even a single wheat plant
 - In other words, the Master cared more for the life of each of those wheat stalks than He did for the overall production in His field
- You and I are those wheat stalks, and Jesus’ primary focus in planting the field of this world is in bringing each of us into the Kingdom
 - As Jesus said in John 6

John 6:37 “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 6:39 “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:40 “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

- Jesus is determined to lose none of those the Father gives Him, and that requires tolerating tares in His field for a time
- But one day He will rectify the situation
- But in the meantime, it also means that Jesus is willing to tolerate less production, and that returns our focus to the Condition 3 Christian
 - Last week Jesus said that those Christians who fail to produce fruit are those distracted and troubled by the world
 - They are those who are weighed down by the worries, riches, and pleasures of life
 - And as a result they neglect their walk with Christ, they fail to devote time and energy to the work of the Kingdom, and they don't produce fruit
- And now we're learning that these outcomes are the direct result of the schemes of the enemy
 - He plants bad seed around us...people who come into our lives, whether personally or indirectly, to create these distractions
 - The ungodly friend who tempts you into bad habits or routines
 - The technology guru whose inventions entrap and distract you, stealing your time and money
 - The Hollywood producer filling your head with vile or lewd images
 - These are all bad seed sown by the enemy in the hope of choking off fruit
- But this is a reality of the Kingdom program...the enemy works to reduce the Lord's yield yet the Lord allows it because He cares for you and will not lose you
 - But knowing this truth does not become excuse for our failure to produce fruit
 - We cannot turn to Jesus later and claim that "the devil made me do it"
 - Rather, I think we will be embarrassed when we realize how little we did to resist these schemes

- Don't let the enemy win in your life...resist him, the Bible says, and he will flee from you
- In the meantime, Jesus did not want His disciples to worry that the enemy might gain the upper hand in his fight
 - He wanted us to know the enemy will not limit the reach of the Kingdom program despite sowing tares in the field
 - In v.31 Jesus says the Kingdom program will grow much like a mustard seed grows in a garden
 - At first, this endeavor will seem quite small and insignificant – especially in the face of such determined opposition
 - After all, if I showed you a mustard seed, who could imagine that much could come from it?
- And I'm sure the disciples felt very small indeed in the initial days and weeks after Jesus' departure from earth
 - They were hiding in homes afraid of challenging the Romans and Jews, much less Satan and his forces
 - But in time, the Kingdom program has grown, like a mustard plant, to the point that it towers over the garden
 - Such will be the progression of the Kingdom program despite the enemy's best efforts to stop it
- In fact, notice the mustard plant has birds nesting in the branches...we first saw Jesus use a bird in a parable in the Sower & Seed
 - And in that parable, the bird represented Satan, and so I believe that imagery is intended to follow here
 - The birds in the tree are like the tares in the field, so as the Kingdom grows it will also attract the enemy's attention
 - And the enemy will try to make a home for himself into the church but he will not stop its growth
 - In fact, the church's growth is what invites the enemy to nest in it
- Finally, in v.33 Jesus reminds us of our role in this program...we are called to reproduce so that we might propel the growth of the Kingdom program

- We are the yeast, the leaven that Jesus hid in the world like the woman hid yeast in her dough
 - We are insignificant in comparison to the world overall in the same way that yeast is an insignificant ingredient compared to the rest of the dough
 - And we are hidden in the world in the same way yeast disappears within the dough
 - Our faith in Jesus is not visible by itself...we can only be known to the world by the effect of our reproduction
- Yeast ultimately makes itself known when it starts to reproduce and spread, and as it does it expands that dough
 - And soon no one could miss the effect of that yeast
 - That's Jesus' call upon our lives...that we be known by our fruit, and our fruit is the seed that results in more production
- The enemy will seek to rob us of our time, talent and treasure so as to limit our production
 - But he will not stop the growth or reach of Jesus' Church...but he may stop your growth and your reach if you allow him
 - The Kingdom program is a work of service to Jesus
 - We aren't accountable for the results of the Kingdom, but we are accountable for our own fruit
 - He who has ears let him hear tonight...