

**Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ**  
**Kingdom Parables**  
**Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven**

Last time...Jesus taught 2 more Kingdom Parables...

2. Parable of the Seed
  3. Parable of the Tares
- and explained in plain terms the Parable of the Tares

This time...another 2 Kingdom Parables

4. Parable of the Mustard Seed
5. Parable of the Leaven

These 2 Parables are somewhat controversial – having 2 very different interpretations

We will be in Mark 4 and Matt 13, starting in Mark 4

**Mark 4**

v30-32 grain of mustard seed...great branches...fowls of the air...under:  
Speaking in parables (comparisons), Jesus teaches Kingdom Parable #4...  
the Kingdom of heaven/God is like a mustard seed that is sown in the  
earth

The mustard seed [ pics ] is the smallest herb seed,  
but it yields the largest herb plant [ pic ]

But then the mustard plant does something normal mustard plants do not do:

- produces great (big) branches
- provides a canopy (shade, covering) for the fowls of the air

This is not normal growth

Now, to Matt 13 for the parallel passage on the Parable of the Mustard Seed

## Matt 13

v31-32 a man...in his field...become a tree...lodge in the branches:

Again we see the mustard seed being sown and growing...

but there are additional pieces of information from Mark's account

- a man sowed
- in his field
- the mustard plant became a tree
- birds of the air lodged in the tree's branches

Jesus does not explain this parable and the disciples do not ask Him to...  
at least not yet and not for all ears

We observe from life on this planet that

- mustard seeds are the smallest herb seeds,  
but they produce the largest herb plants (spice and medicinal uses)
- a mustard plant [ pic ]
  - erect, branched plant
  - grows to be from one to three feet high i.e. a shrub/bush in size

But then in the parable the mustard plant does something normal mustard plants  
do not do:

- it becomes a tree
- the fowls of the air live/lodge in it

This is not normal growth, is this

- a. supernatural growth?
  - a marvelous mystery of God
- b. abnormal growth?
  - a mustard plant does not become a tree...NEVER grows as large as a tree, sturdy enough to house "guests"
  - not as the Creator intended it

How are we to interpret the Parable of the Mustard Seed,  
how are we to rightly divide this Word of truth?

As I mentioned, there are two very different interpretations

1. “Positive” Interpretation

Mustard is a herb, grown with other herbs in a garden (not a field) of a householder, like the one that planted good seed in his field; the setting has a more “home-y” feel than that of the cold, hard, hostile field

The birds are blessed to be under the covering of the mustard “tree” and to lodge in its branches, feeding on its seeds

Jesus sows the seed of the Church in the world

The Church starts oh so small but supernaturally and astonishingly grows over time until the Church influences the world such that

- evil in the world loses its influence
- the whole world is converted to Christianity
- all nations are blessed by the Church

Just as in OT when a mighty kingdom gave shelter for the nations (Dan 4, Ezk 31), so will be the Messianic Kingdom (Ezk 17:22-24)

Q: When is the Messianic kingdom and who establishes it?

This interpretation is taught by those who preach a man-centered, social gospel in which the Church establishes the Kingdom of God on earth and then Jesus returns to earth

2. “Negative” Interpretation

We need to remember Mark 4:13, after the disciples and they that were about Jesus asked Him to explain the Parable of the Sower: How then will you know all parables?

The Word of God will interpret the Word of God...man must not

Bearing in mind Jesus’ explanations of the Parables of the Sower and of the Tares:

- a man = the Son of Man, Jesus (Matt 13:24, 37)
- his field = the world (Matt 13:24, 38)
- fowls of the air = devils (Matt 13:4, 19)

Jesus sows the seed of the Church in the world

The Church starts oh so small but grows over time, as it was intended to by God

But then the Church grows abnormally...something is amiss

If this interpretation is correct, we would see it play out in  
Scripture and in Church History  
Rev 2-3, Letters to the 7 Churches dictated by Jesus Christ  
Himself, about 60 years after the Church was planted

Ephesus:	Apostolic Church	30 – 100 (1 <sup>st</sup> century)
Smyrna:	Persecuted Church	100 – 312 (2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> )
Pergamum	Imperial Church	312 – 606 (4 <sup>th</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> )
Thyatira	Papal Church	606 – Tribulation (7 <sup>th</sup> - )
Sardis	Reformed Church	1520 – Tribulation (16 <sup>th</sup> - )
Philadelphia	Missionary Church	1750 – Rapture (18 <sup>th</sup> - )
Laodicea	Apostate Church	1900 – Tribulation (20 <sup>th</sup> - )

Jesus rebukes 5 of the 7...  
not Smyrna/Persecuted or Philadelphia/Missionary  
because they were not a good witness of Him

Abnormal growth took place in Pergamum/Imperial Church when  
Constantine became the emperor of the Roman Empire  
and declared Christianity to be the state religion  
(merger of State and Church)

Pagan rites and festivals rooted in Babylon were merged with  
Christianity...the names being changed to protect the  
guilty

- Christmas
- Easter
- Queen of Heaven

The Church became something it was not intended to become...

- unholy
- worldly
  - influenced by the world
  - compromising with the world
- deceptively absorbing pagan gods and worship  
practices by putting Christian names on them  
(Halloween became another in 9<sup>th</sup> Century)

and demons took roost in the Church

The Church was corrupted...  
but it “exploded” in terms of growth, power, and influence  
(Holy Roman Empire...Middle Ages)

Spiritually speaking with regards to the Parable of the Mustard Seed, Jesus foretold of abnormal growth in the Church  
The “something is amiss” is that Satan joined the Church in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century after not successfully persecuting/exterminating it for 300 years (during which time the church prospered)

This abnormal development greatly blossomed in Thyatira...  
the Papal Church that is still with us today

The mustard seed becoming a tree

- a corruption of what God intended
- a haven for all kinds of false doctrines and practices
- a lodge for demons

is Satan compromising the Church...

the Church compromising with Satan

Today

- 1 out of 6 people claim the Papal Church (Thyatira)
- Millions claim the Reformed Church (Sardis)
- Millions claim the modern Apostate Church (Laodicea)
- 31% of the world’s populations claims Christianity as its religion (2.2 B)

If we re-consider the “Positive” interpretation that that Church influences the world such that

- evil in the world loses its influence
- the whole world is converted to Christianity
- all nations are blessed by the Church

we must also consider

- the job is 31% done after 2000 yrs, leaving >6500 yrs to complete the job (then Jesus returns to earth)
- or longer considering Islam is the world’s fastest growing religion
- will the world last that long?

But Scripture and Church History tell us that a mere 60 years after Acts 2, the Church had drifted

Now, in 2016...it is all but unrecognizable, not what God had intended it to be

The Church-centric (“Positive”) interpretation is false,  
is not right-thinking

Now the Parable of the Leaven, Kingdom Parable #5

v33 leaven...hid in three measures of meal...whole was leavened:

A woman, the one who made bread for the family, incorporated leaven into the dough...until all the dough was leavened

Leaven

Fermentation, the most fundamental biological process in bread-making, is initiated and sustained by yeast.

Its role in bread making is to convert sugars to carbon dioxide gas and thus ferment/leaven the dough; why bread has holes in it.

Yeast fermentation is also involved in the maturation of the dough and, like wine or beer, contributes greatly to the taste of bread

Jesus does not explain this parable and the disciples do not ask Him to... at least not yet and not for all ears

So how are we to interpret the Parable of the Leaven, how are we to rightly divide this Word of truth?

As I mentioned with the Parable of the Mustard Seed, there are two very different interpretations, interpretations that are contrary

1. "Positive" Interpretation

By itself, leaven is not of much value; it must be in dough to make the bread rise, etc

The Church is not to withdraw from the world but to be in it, transforming the world with the truth of the Gospel

The Church, in the world but not of the world, is a positive, transforming, leavening influence on the world

The Gospel gradually, wholly transforms men's

- lives...newness of life (Rom 6:4)
- minds...the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5-8)
- souls...to love vs hate both God and man
- wills...God's will be done, not theirs
- hope...a blessed hope (Titus 2:11-13)
- bodies...temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20)
- relationships...every – family, work, neighbor, enemy
- citizenship...into the kingdom of God (Phil 3:20-21)

All true

With Gospel, the Church transforms the world such that all men

1 Cor 5:17

Rom 12:1-2

2. “Negative” Interpretation

a. Leaven in Scripture is not a good thing

- a process of corruption/deterioration by rotting
- that which puffs up, a type of pride and sin

Lev 2:11 No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven

Luke 12:1 Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy

Matt 16:12 Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees

Gal 5:7-9 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion *cometh* not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump

1 Cor 5:6-8

b. 3 measures of meal (= 1 ephah)

Abraham (Gen 18:1-6)...1<sup>st</sup> Mention, Lord + 2 angels

Gideon (Judges 6:11-21)...Angel of Lord, fire out of rock

Hannah (1 Sam 1:24)...”offering” Samuel to the Lord

= the meal offering, our communion and fellowship with the Lord...sacrifices without leaven!

- c. Lev 23:15-17 Pentecost: 2 loaves baked **with** leaven  
Acts 2 fulfilled...birth of Church  
promise of the Father...Holy Spirit *upon*  
Holy Spirit works within us like leaven  
i.e. the leaven of God changes our nature and character into that which is good, sweet-smelling

Yet we see another Leaven, a worldly one that that corrupts the Church: hypocrisy, malice, wickedness, compromise  
Scripture and Church history tells us that the Church was leavened in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century (works)...Jesus rebuked Ephesus!  
And the “growth” from Ephesus to Laodicea by and large is NOT the stuff of Acts 2

So, when it comes to interpreting the Parable of the Leaven

Is the Church transforming the world?

Is the Church’s influence in the world waning or rising?

Is the world’s influence in the Church waning or rising?

Jesus Christ is again foretelling of “something is amiss” from what God intended

v34-35 All things...in parables:

Remember the turning point in Matt 12:24...teaching that requires faith  
And in so doing, Jesus fulfilled (Matt 5:17) Scripture (Ps 78:2)  
regarding the mysteries of God

## **Mark 4**

v33-34 many such parables:

More of them recorded in Matt 13 than here in Mark 4...Mark records no others

Jesus taught

- “them”...the people...in parables
- the 12 disciples the clear meaning of all the parables, in private  
(v11-12)

## **Application:**

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven are complementary,  
not in a “feel good” sense but in the sense that Jesus is teaching the same message  
2 different ways

The Church (yet future to when Jesus is teaching the Kingdom Parables) becomes that which  
God did not intend...”something is amiss”

The Church, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ is to be...Christian = “Christ-like”

- be like Jesus...gracious, merciful, kind, loving, longsuffering, suffering, holy
- sound and smell like Jesus
- bear The Light of the world
- to obey and follow Jesus (NOT the world)
- to love Israel (NOT replace and condemn)
- deny Self and pick up His Cross (NOT indulging and removing)
- baptized with the Holy Spirit, the baptism of Jesus (NOT denying)
- The Word of God is the Final Authority, inspired/inerrant/infallible

Looking WITHIN the Church today, are most “Christians” like Christ or like the world?



Looking AT the Church today, which is true?

1. “Positive” Interpretation

The Church, starting so small and weak, hidden and almost imperceptible,  
grows extensively (Mustard Seed) and intensively (Leaven) in its  
power and influence in the world

The Church triumphs over the evil in the world via proclaiming the Gospel  
(true Gospel)

2. “Negative” Interpretation

The Church is

- is corrupted by the world...more worldly than Godly
- teaches
  - Gen 1-11 is NOT literal
  - the gifts of the Spirit are NOT for today
  - there is NO such thing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit
  - a Cross-less, social gospel
  - not the entire counsel of God as Paul did, but instead  
pick and choose snippets, topical, superficial, carnal
  - TULIP of Calvinism
  - endless winds of false doctrines (contrary to the Truth)
- Gal 3:3

But this Word is to me and you...individually

- Am I more like Christ or more like the world?
- Is the leaven of God or is the leaven of the world working in me?
- Is the Church my blessed hope or is Jesus Christ?
  
- Is my spiritual growth as God intended
  - Jesus-centered
  - The work of the Holy Spirit
  - orderly: humility and submission
  - denying Self and picking of the Cross
  - Spirit-filled and Spirit-ledor is there a corrupting influence (false gospel, false teaching) fueling it?
  
- Am I influencing people around me
  - shining my light in a wicked and perverse generation
  - loving the unlovely
  - speaking the truth in love
  - having a blessed hope in a hopeless world
  - walking with Jesus above the violent storms of lifeor are they influencing me?

Mark 4:22-23

Let's seek the Lord and cry out for His help to live out Gal 2:20

If the Holy Spirit is speaking to you that you...He convicts us of sin...  
repent and be baptized with the Holy Spirit

If Jesus Christ is not the Lord of your life, pray to receive Him into your heart,  
be supernaturally transformed, pleasing to the Father

Small group prayer

Closing song