

Seeing God's Great Work through Small Windows

Thomas Robinson, *Deeper with Jesus*, 2, February 2, 2014

Matthew 13:24-43

Parable of the Wheat and 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 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 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."'"

Parable of the Mustard Seed

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."

Parable of the Yeast

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."

Interpreting the Allegory of the Wheat and Weeds

³⁴ All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

*I will open my mouth in parables;
I will utter what has been hidden
since the foundation of the world.* [Psalm 78:2]

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."

Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a **son of man**, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a **kingdom**, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him, ... and **his kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed.**"

Daniel 12:2-3

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Invading the Imagination

Jesus' parables both reveal and conceal. Jesus was partly in the role Isaiah had been in: announcing God's grace and judgment, and watching his people choosing a path toward disastrous judgment, destruction. So many were unable to believe him that God was calling them to a new path for a new time. They had their own ideas about God's kingdom & Messiah. He told parables. For those beginning to understand him, they provided vivid images to imagine God's work, his invading kingdom in new ways. For others deeply opposed to his message, they remained strange little stories. They heard but did not hear. Matthew helps us hear them both as the crowds heard and as the disciples heard. Still, Jesus left the disciples puzzling, thinking. The Kingdom of God: If God's going to rule, it means revolution, throwing out the Gentiles/Rome/Herod. That's why the talk was dangerous. John facing death. If God rules, it means a pure community. Only God's people living by the highest standards can bring it about/be worthy.

Mustard Seed and Yeast

Jesus gives two very brief parables, small windows. What does God's in-breaking kingdom look like? A great army invading Jerusalem and Rome? A vast temple complex? Look again. A tiny seed. Growing. It becomes a place for all birds to make homes. (Echoes of the world tree in Dan 4:12.) Yeast in dough. It transforms powerfully, but where's the excitement. People can buy into great actions. Or be frightened. (Daniel's stone, Dan 2:34-45) But who wants to watch a tree grow or dough rise? No growing seed's going to stop Herod or Pilate! Jesus points to how God works rather than how we do. In Matthew's time there were still only small groups with vast hopes.

Wheat and Weeds Together

Jesus tells a bit longer parable. It's a story of sowing, like "the Sower," but different. A man sows wheat in his field. His enemy sows a kind of ryegrass that looks like wheat but just soaks up the moisture and bears no grain. What to do? Let both grow together!? Anyone serious about God's will knew that's not God's kingdom. Only a pure community could bring God's kingdom! Jesus saw things through a different lens with different purpose. He called everyone, including the "pure," to transformation in the midst of a broken world. Radicalism of "us pure" against "them impure" is popular. Radicalism of transformation by God's gift of grace is hard. I want a Messiah that recognizes how good I am and invites me, rather one that sees how broken and weak I am and transforms me. Jesus doesn't kick out the tax-collectors or the Pharisees. Matthew quotes Ps 78 that this has always been God's real, hidden way. Jesus gives the disciples a quick allegory key – 7 items. Echoes of Daniel ring through (fiery furnace, shining righteous). But the impact is that God's kingdom grows in a mixed and broken world. The field doesn't have one pure corner where the wheat stalks huddle together. A time for judgment will definitely come, but it is not now, not for us. Now is the time to be wheat, planted by Jesus.

Being Wheat – God's Work in God's World

Be wheat? That's not exciting. I want to be a revolutionary, a change agent. I want to be part of an elite, pure community sent on hard missions for God. Well, maybe? There are real challenges. But being wheat means recognizing that this is God's kingdom, not mine. He is doing his work. I'm the receiver of his grace. I live only by his power, his planting, his love. I give only what is his.