

# Matthew 13:24-43

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 March 2015

Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[ 0 : 00 ] Many years ago, I lived in Kenya for a year. A friend, an African friend, came round to have some tea and bread and stuff with us. And in the process of sitting there, Wesley noticed this pot of brown stuff sitting on the table, and assuming it was chocolate spread, expecting it was chocolate spread, took a big knife full of it, some of you can see where this is going, spread it thickly on his bread, and took a big bite out of it.

Only to discover that Marmite is not chocolate spread. Suffice it to say, Wesley never went near pot of Marmite ever again in his life. He had the wrong expectations, that was a trouble.

If I had the heart to tell him that actually what he put on his plate was something incredibly salty, it might have helped him. But expecting chocolate spread, he bit heartily into this thick layer of Marmite and was truly appalled.

See, we need to have the right expectations, don't we? If we have the wrong expectations of things, then we'll get very quickly disappointed. In fact, companies launching new products spend thousands and thousands of pounds testing out people's expectations of what the product is going to be like, so they can pitch it to the right place in the market.

And so the disciples here, whom Jesus is talking to here, were having a problem with their expectations. They'd seen Jesus do amazing things. They'd seen him drive out demons, heal the sick.

[ 1 : 20 ] They'd heard incredible teaching. So much so that the crowds that followed around Jesus, followed him to hear his teaching, followed him to see what he'd do next. And they'd start to think, who is this guy? If you turn back over the page for a second, you'll see as Jesus heals a blind and mute man, chapter 12, verse 23.

All the people were amazed and said, can this be the son of David? The son of David, the great king, is going to come and bring us freedom. Could this be Jesus? Could this be who Jesus is? So this expectation that perhaps he would be the king, perhaps he would throw out the Romans, perhaps his kingdom would be established in great power and glory there and then in their day. That is what they expected. And yet at the same time, Jesus is facing a lot of opposition. So just after that, the religious people said, no, he's not from God, it's by Satan's power that he's driving out demons.

So there's this opposition, this conflict, there are crowds who listen but then turn away. And so the disciples were, and indeed all the crowds, were confused. What is going on? They were confused in part because they had the wrong expectations.

[ 2 : 32 ] They expected a great kingdom to be established straight away with great power and glory. And so Jesus is telling them these parables to set their expectations right.

At the start of chapter 13, we read it, on the same day. The same day there had been conflict. The same day Jesus had healed people and yet been accused of being Satan. On that very day when opposition was arising, Jesus tells these stories.

And what I want us to do at the moment is first look at the purpose of Jesus telling these parables. And then we'll look at the points he is making in the parables of the yeast, the mustard seed and the weeds.

We're going to start in the middle of the passage, as it were, in verses 34 and 35 and then work backwards. Let's look at verses 34 and 35. What was the purpose of Jesus using parables?

If you were here a couple of weeks ago, we saw that part of the purpose, from earlier in the chapter, is actually parables are a means of judgment. For the crowds who weren't really interested, who wouldn't really think or inquire what Jesus was saying.

[ 3 : 36 ] It was a means of judgment. They just wouldn't understand what was being said. But here we get a second, more positive reason why Jesus uses parables. It's because he reveals God's purposes through the parables.

Look at verse 34. All these things Jesus said to the crowd in parables. Indeed he said nothing to them without a parable. In other words, in all his teaching, he was using some parables.

Why? This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet. Now we get a quote from Psalm 78 in the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before. I will open my mouth in parables.

I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. You want to look that up afterwards. You read through Psalm 78. You'll discover it was written by a guy called Asaph. It was a psalm that really recounted Israel's history.

And God's dealing with them through their history. God's mercy to them and forgiveness. So in one sense there was nothing hidden about that. It was all public knowledge. But what was hidden before was that people hadn't really compared how God had worked at various stages.

[ 4 : 41 ] Hadn't really seen how God was revealing himself. And so Asaph the psalmist says, I'm going to tell you this parable. I'm going to tell you about God's purposes from the beginning which are currently hidden from you.

And that's what Jesus is doing here. And he's fulfilling that. In the sense that he's fulfilling that role. He's fulfilling the role of a teacher who comes and reveals God's plans and purposes to the crowds. Things which are hidden. Things that you and I as human beings could never guess at. Could never find. But need to be told to us. That's what Jesus is doing.

He's revealing God's purposes. Things which we cannot guess. Things which we cannot observe on our own. Things that we need God to tell us about. So that's the purpose that Jesus is using the parables.

Now what's the point he's making in each parable? Let's work back through them briefly and see.

So let's start with verse 33. The parable of the leaven. He told them another parable.

[ 5 : 44 ] The kingdom of heaven is like the leaven that a woman took. And hid in three measures of flour till it was all leavened. Leavened. Now I don't know if any of you bake bread here. I've done it once or twice.

When you're reading the bread and making instructions. Does it ever say hide the yeast in the dough? Do you have a conscience that you think I'm hiding the yeast in the dough? No. Of course not.

And in Greek. The language the New Testament is written in. There are other more natural words to use here. You mix leaven into a dough. You don't hide it. The point Jesus is making though is that God's kingdom.

God's rule in this world. Is something that's hidden at the moment. It's not coming in spectacular style. It's hidden.

Just like yeast is hidden in a batch of dough. That was a surprise to people listening. They thought when God's king came it would be a powerful show of power.

[ 6 : 46 ] Power and wonder. And the Roman enemies who control them would be thrown out. But Jesus is saying no that's not the way it comes. God's rule in this earth is like leaven hidden in a batch of dough.

It is hidden. You cannot see it. I wonder what you think about God's power in the world today. Sometimes we think if God is real.

If there really is the God of the Bible and is still there. Why doesn't he make himself clearer? If God is so powerful and great. Then he can create a universe. How come the church.

How come Christian believers seem so insignificant? I often go into. A couple of times a year at least. Go into the city of London. For meetings at a church called St. Helens Bishopsgate.

Which is right in the heart of the city. And right behind St. Helens. You've got the Gherkin. Right next to it you've got one of these huge skyscrapers going up. You can't even see it from the street front.

[ 7 : 47 ] You have to kind of go in through a passageway. To find this little church. Surrounded by huge buildings. Where powerful companies have their headquarters. In a sense it's hidden. And all around it you get the obvious power of the world.

And of money. If God is real. Why isn't everything more powerful? Then look what Jesus says here. At the moment the kingdom of heaven. God's power in the world.

God's rule in the world. Is hidden. But what's the effect? It's hidden three measures of flour. Until it was all leavened. Three measures. A measure was 13 litres.

Three measures of flour. Nearly 40 litres. That's enough bread for 100 people. Or 150 people.

Depending on how much bread you eat. And this bit of leaven. Can make that whole lot rise.

The kingdom is hidden. But brings transformation. That's the point Jesus is making. God's rule in this world is hidden. But it brings transformation. Back in the early days of the church.

[ 8 : 51 ] In the Roman Empire. Often babies were just wrapped out on rubbish tips. Because they were unwanted. By the pagan world around them. It's the Christians.

Whose lives were being transformed. By the good news of Jesus. Who went and rescued those children. Who brought them up as their own. And so gradually. The Roman Empire was transformed.

Through the witness of those believers. We think of many tales like that. We think of lives that have changed today. As people come to acknowledge. That Jesus is God's king. And under his rule.

Their lives are transformed.

God's kingdom. May be hidden. But it is effective. It's hidden. But it brings transformation. That's the first point Jesus wants to make. The second. Looking back at verse 31.

Is that God's kingdom is small now. But it will be huge. Look at verse 31. He put another parable before them. Saying. The kingdom of heaven. Is like a grain of mustard seed. That a man took.

[ 9 : 52 ] And sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds. But when it is 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.

See the contrast here. You've got a very small seed. And it grows up into something big. And actually Jesus. Deliberately uses exaggerated language here. No one could ever realistically call a mustard bush.

A tree. It is compared to their garden plants. It's taller than your average tomato. But Jesus actually calls it a tree here. And uses the picture of birds coming to rest in it.

To exaggerate and emphasize the size of this thing. It started so small. And yet it grows so big. As we read through the gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

Think what happens. As Jesus is arrested. All his followers run away. Even after the resurrection.

Even after he's been raised from the dead. And ascended into heaven. In Acts chapter 1.

[ 10 : 50 ] We read there are just 120 believers. Sitting in a room in Jerusalem. Just 120 people. In all the world. Who that day believed that Jesus was God's king.

How small. How pathetic. How tiny. If that's God's work. How could it be so small. Yet that was about 30 AD.

By 49 AD. There were enough Christians in the city of Rome. In the center of the Roman Empire.

Thousands of miles from Jerusalem. But the Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome.

Because he was worried about the argument going on between them. About those who are claiming that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. How in 19 years. From those 120 frightened people in Jerusalem.

Did God's good news about Jesus spread all the way to Rome. To the heart of the empire. How come by 64 AD. There were enough Christians in Rome. That Nero. Having started the great fire himself probably.

[ 11 : 50 ] Could then blame the great fire of Rome. On the Christians. Because they were a helpful scapegoat for him. To preserve his popularity. It's a miracle isn't it?

In a day before the internet. In a day before satellite television. That news could spread. It started so small. And it grows. And we may feel in this country.

That the church is small. You see churches. Turned into Hindu temples down the road. You see churches turned into luxury flats. Not far from where I used to live. And we can think the church is very small.

Very insignificant. And God's rule is very insignificant. Yet the truth is all over the world. More and more people are coming to Christ. Jesus as king. Every day. In China some say 20,000 every week.

I don't know how you compute that. But at the very least. What starts as a small mustard seed. Is growing. It looks so insignificant. But grows so huge. From those humble beginnings.

[12:50] And the picture here. A tree with birds nesting in its branches. Is borrowed from the Old Testament. From Daniel chapter 4. Or Ezekiel chapter 17.

Where trees and birds resting in them. And animals sheltering under them. Are images used to describe great empires. And here. Jesus.

Is showing what is currently a mustard seed. What seems so small. What seems so easy to ignore. Is one day going to be. The ultimate empire. The kingdom of God.

It starts small. But it will grow to become huge. So how do you feel when you look around? When you look around at the number of Christians. Or Christian influence in society.

I know some people get very discouraged. If we're discouraged. It's because we've got the wrong expectations. We're like Wesley. Biting into the Marmite sandwich.

[13:47] Thinking it's chocolate spread. It's not going to look powerful and wonderful now. But Jesus says trust me. It starts small. It ends up large. It's hidden. But it is effective.

It will bring transformation. There's one of the lessons he wants us to learn. Let's look back to this big parable. The parable of the weeds. Verses 24 to 30. Well 24 to 6.

24 to 30. He tells the story. And 26 to 42. He explains it. So you see the story. A man goes out to sow seed. Goes off to bed.

And at night. What happens? An enemy comes out. Verse 25. While he's sleeping. An enemy sowed weeds. Among the weeds. And went away. What's going on?

What's going on? Remember Jesus is speaking. In a day of opposition. In a day when the religious. The great esteemed religious group.

[14:43] The Pharisees. Have said that Jesus has actually got Satan's power. When the disciples are starting to wonder what's going on. So Jesus is explaining. Why there is opposition in the world.

I wonder how you feel as you look at the news. You see 21 Coptic Christians. Being killed by Islamic State. In Libya. Or you hear of Christians. Arrested for their faith in Iran.

Or you see Boko Haram. Destroying churches. And destroying whole villages. In Nigeria. Or maybe in your own life. When you feel. If you're a Christian.

You sometimes feel ostracised. By people at work. Or maybe rejected by your family. If you trust in Jesus. Or maybe you're here. Because you're just considering the whole Christian faith. And perhaps it puts you off. Looking at this opposition.

Do I really want that? Well here Jesus is explaining. Where the opposition comes from. He says. Verse 24. There's this enemy out there. Who has sown the false seed.

[15:42] Sown the weeds. In the good field. Now that might sound like a far-fetched story. To you and I. But actually in Roman law at this time. There was a law against.

Taking revenge over your enemies. By planting weeds in their land. And specifically there's a weed called darnel. Which apparently. I know nothing about these things. I know nothing about botany or agriculture.

But apparently darnel. In the early stages of its growth. Looks very like wheat. So. And also it's. It's roots get really entangled. Around the roots of the wheat.

So it's very hard to pull it out. And so some people would sabotage. Their neighbours or their enemies. By throwing these weeds. Into this field. So Jesus is using this kind of real life illustration.

To explain what has happened. In human history. What is happening in human history. So verse. Look at the explanation down there. In verse 36. Or verse 38.

[16:41] The field is the world. The good seed is the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. And the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The Bible tells us. In the beginning. God made a perfect world. There was nothing wrong.

It was a place of beauty. And happiness. And peace. And joy. But then Satan came in. God's great enemy. And tempted people to doubt God's goodness. And to disobey God's word.

And so he sowed. The seeds of discord. Sowed his own children. As it were. In this world. So there has always been conflict. Throughout human history. Always been opposition.

And we may wonder. Why doesn't God just. Just get rid of it all now. Why doesn't he just judge the world now. Why doesn't he put an end to Boko Haram. And Islamic State.

Why doesn't he put an end. To the people who. Who despise Christians. Despise me. Well here's the answer Jesus says. We're going to wait.

[17:37] That will not happen to the day of harvest. I wonder how we. How we react. When we see that. Sort of conflict around us. And opposition. Even in our own lives.

To the Christian faith. At various points in church history. People try to do different things. So at some stages. Christians are trying to. Dominate. And just get rid of opposition that way. So I was hearing earlier this week. From a Spanish. Newfound friend of mine. That when Spain first had a Christian king. Sometime in the Middle Ages. What he did. Was kick out all the Jews. And all the Muslims. To an attempt by domination. To make a Christian society. Nowadays we don't tend to do that. What we can do is. Try and withdraw. Take out. Christians create their own little. Holy. Cliques as it were. Hoddles. And Jesus says. That's not the way. The way is always going to be.

[ 18 : 32 ] There's going to be a mixture. In this world. There will be opposition. There will be. The sons of. The sons of the kingdom. Those who trusted Jesus as their king. And the sons of the enemy. The devil. And do you notice.

We're all in this story. There are only two types of people. We're either. On the devil's side. Or on Jesus' side. That's what Jesus is saying.

There is no. Spiritual equivalent. Of Switzerland. There is no. Neutral ground. Either on the devil's side.

Or on Jesus' side. Well let's look. So how do we. How do we cope with that? Well let's look. What Jesus says. Doesn't say withdraw. Doesn't say dominate. He says wait patiently.

That's what he says. Look at verse 40. The explanation. Just as the weeds are gathered. And burned with fire. So it will be at the end of the age. The son of man will send his angels. And they will gather out of his kingdom.

[ 19 : 25 ] All causes of sin. And all lawbreakers. Now causes of sin are of course people. It's people we call the sin. Who lead others into temptation. He says they're all going to be removed.

And throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping. And gnashing of teeth. See Jesus is clear isn't he? He says there will be a final judgment. Yes at the moment there is opposition in this world.

But at the end of the day. There will be final judgment. Just as there are only two types of people. So there are only two possible results of the judgment.

See all of us are either weeds. Or good weeds. So we're either going to be burned in the fire. Verse 42. Or. Verse 43. Then the righteous will shine like the sun.

In the kingdom of their father. So either. We are lawbreakers and causes of sin. Or we're righteous. If we're lawbreakers and causes of sin.

[ 20 : 26 ] We face hell. That's what the burning is. If we are righteous. We go. To the perfect world. And shine like the sun. In the kingdom of the father.

So the question is. How can we be righteous? How can we make sure. We're the wheat. Not the weeds. Well on the face of it.

It's impossible for any of us to be righteous. Isn't it? Jesus said. When asked what the law was. What does God want? He said. The greatest commandment is this. To love the Lord your God. With all your heart. With all your soul. With all your mind. With all your strength. And to love your neighbours as yourself. Yet who of us has done that? And yet there is faith.

Earlier on in Matthew's gospel. Back in chapter 9. Jesus had been out to lunch. With some tax collectors and sinners. And the self-righteous religious people. Got really annoyed about this. Said Jesus.

[ 21 : 20 ] Why are you eating with these people? So as Jesus said. Matthew 9 verse 13. I have not come to call the righteous. But sinners. In other words.

Jesus came to make people. Who are naturally sinners. People like me. And you. And make us. Into righteous. In his sight. We find he did that.

Ultimately. By dying the death we deserve. He went to the cross. As the only righteous person. Who ever lived. The only person who didn't deserve. To be punished.

And there he took. The punishment we deserved. He became sin. He took our lawlessness. So that we could have his righteousness.

So the righteous. Are not those who are morally good. But those who have bowed the knee. To Jesus as their king. Do you see the contrast?

[ 22 : 17 ] They end up with a glorious ending. Verse 43. Right now. They might be insignificant. They might be hard to tell apart. Even from the weeds in the field. But then.

After the judgment. Then the righteous. Those who trusted Jesus as God's king. Will shine like the sun. In the kingdom of their father. Inconspicuous now.

Incredibly glorious there. Just a few pages later on. In Matthew's gospel. We read of Jesus. Being transfigured. In front of his disciples. And Matthew uses almost the same words there.

He shone like the sun. That is the future. That awaits those who trust him. What is this kingdom going to be like? Well it's going to be perfect. Isn't it? Because all the causes of sin.

And all the unrighteousness. Has already been weeded out. It's going to be a perfect world. Even better than the world. As God originally made it. So what Jesus is holding out here to us.

[ 23 : 13 ] Is a great hope. The kingdom. Is hidden now. But does bring transformation eventually. The kingdom is small now. But will be huge eventually.

The kingdom faces opposition now. But will triumph eventually. I wonder how you feel about that. A friend of mine emailed me the other day. Saying. You know it's true. I don't believe in heaven and hell like you do.

He was not wanting me to talk anymore. About what Jesus had said. Well that's his choice. But notice.

If you don't believe in heaven and hell. If you don't believe. In a devil who has corrupted God's world. Then look who you're disagreeing with. At the end of verse 43. If you're not disagreeing with me.

How does Jesus finish? He who has ears. Let him hear. He who has ears. Let him hear. Jesus. Is revealing God's plans for history to us.

[ 24 : 16 ] Are we going to let Jesus shape our expectations? Or do you want to disagree with Jesus? He who has ears. Let him hear. Let's pray.

Let him hear.