

5 September 2021

Parables of how the kingdom grows – Matthew 13:31-35

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.”

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.”

³⁴ All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfil 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.”

Opening discussion – our reflections on world events

Question 1: When you see or hear disheartening news (e.g. Afghanistan, ever-growing secularisation), how does it make you feel about Jesus’ promises about triumph of Kingdom of God? How does it impact your faith and witness?

Jesus’ use of parables – *Jesus deliberately teaches using parables.*

Question 2: What is a parable and why does Jesus choose to teach in this way (vv34-35)?

Question 3: To what extent should we seek to assign spiritual significance / meaning to all the details of a parable (especially when Jesus does not explain the parables as is the case here compared with other parables in Matthew 13 – e.g. parable of the sower or the parable of the wheat and weeds)?

Question 4: Consider the details of the two parables in vv31-33. To what extent do all the details have spiritual significance (e.g. use of grain of mustard; birds perching in branches mustard plant; woman taking three measures of flour) or are they just there to establish the salient point of the parable story?

Encouraging our faith – *Jesus uses these parables both to ensure we have realistic expectations about the future, but also to encourage his hearers and our faith.*

Question 5: But what actually is faith? How do we build lasting faith? Why is it so difficult just to will / force ourselves to have more faith? Look at Hebrews 11:1 & 6.

How the Kingdom of Heaven grows – *Matthew 13 contains a series of parables about the Kingdom of Heaven. These two parables in vv31-33 focus on the particular ways in which the Kingdom of Heaven grows.*

Question 6: What are these particular ways in vv31-33?

Question 7: To what extent have you seen these demonstrated – historically, in church, in your own life and family?

Question 8: What insights may Jesus be teaching about how we should live and serve the Lord through these two parables?

Question 9: How do these two parables fit with the other parables about the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 13? What total picture do we get?

Question 10: Are there areas right now or in the past where you are struggling / have struggled to see God at work or where there are seeds that don’t / didn’t seem to be growing? How might you / did you face this?