

The Parables

The coming kingdom of God

The Parables

Class 1: **What is a Parable?**

Class 2: **Why Parables?**

Class 3: **Jesus' Parables**

The coming kingdom of God

Why Parables?

Jesus' answer

(Mark 4:23–25 ESV)

“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.””

Why Parables?

Jesus' answer

(Romans 9:18 ESV)

“So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.”

Why Parables?

Jesus' answer

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The Parables

Thematic Groupings

The coming reign/kingdom of God (6 parables)

The grace of God's reign/kingdom (9 parables)

The challenge of discipleship (11 parables)

The call to repentance (7 parables)

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The grace of God's reign/kingdom (9 parables)

The challenge of discipleship (11 parables)

The call to repentance (7 parables)

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Matthew 13:31–32 ESV) Parable: The mustard seed

“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. 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.””

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Ezekiel 17:22–24 ESV)

“Thus says the Lord GOD: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.””

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Ezekiel 31:15–17 ESV)

“Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day the cedar went down to Sheol I caused mourning; I closed the deep over it, and restrained its rivers, and many waters were stopped. I clothed Lebanon in gloom for it, and all the trees of the field fainted because of it. I made the nations quake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to Sheol with those who go down to the pit. And all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the world below. They also went down to Sheol with it, to those who are slain by the sword; yes, those who were its arm, who lived under its shadow among the nations.”

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Matthew 17:20 ESV)

“He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.””

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

Summary: The mustard seed

- Elements of hyperbole/exaggeration of the mustard seed being the smallest of the seeds, growing into a **tree** that provides shade for the birds. The emphasis of the parable is the contrast between the diminutive seed and its exaggerated growth into a tree.
- Similar OT allegories of shade-providing tree-kingdoms (Eze. 17:22, 31:15, Dan. 4:10), but they all describe mighty trees (e.g. cedar). Jesus like the mustard seed/shrub was far below Jewish expectation, but God “makes high the low tree” (Eze. 17), and his kingdom will fill the earth, providing shade for all nations (who accept him).

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

Summary: The mustard seed

- As one of the birds, where am I making my home? In the shade and the branches of the proud tree-kingdoms of this world, which like Assyria and Babylon will be brought low by the coming of the full glory of the kingdom of God? Or in the shade of Jesus, the true branch, the small sprig/shrub that is growing into the kingdom of God?

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Mark 4:26–29 ESV) Parable: The growing seed

“And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.””

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Joel 3:12–13 ESV)

“Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. **Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.** Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.”

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

Summary: The growing seed

- The emphasis of this parable on the coming kingdom of God is the relative inaction of the sower
- Harvest represents judgement (Joel 3:12)
- Similar to the inaction of the sower, Jesus' ministry seemed to bear little resemblance to the coming of the kingdom of God, of the resurgence of Israel as a world power, yet illustrated Jesus' understanding of his own role, to speak the words of his Father, scatter the seed, not at this time to take by force.

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

Summary: The growing seed

- Do I scatter the seed of the gospel message?
- Am I hindered in my scattering, consumed with my own importance in the process? How the ground is prepared, how and where I scatter the seed, how I care for it, water it and feed it? Or do I truly understand the message of this parable - that the seed is God's and it is only God that oversees and manages its growth?
- Do I think the crop will fail without me and that no one else can do it properly? Am I overbearing, deciding which plants are suitable before the appointed time? Am I patient, do I trust that the time of harvest will come, and wait for it in faith?

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Matthew 13:33 ESV) Parable: The leaven

“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.””

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Genesis 18:2–3,6 ESV)

“He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant ... And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.”

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Matthew 24:7–8, 14 ESV)

“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains... And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Mark 8:15 ESV)

“And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.””

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(1 Corinthians 5:6 ESV)

“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”

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Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

(Galatians 5:7–9 ESV)

“You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

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Summary: The leaven

- The emphasis of this parable is on the action and hiddenness of the leaven
- Jesus' ministry was having none of these dramatic effects, yet it was quietly, in hiding, working to bring about God's kingdom

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

Summary: The leaven

- Do I underestimate the power of God, through his word, to bring about revolutionary change in my own life or in the lives of others because its progression doesn't meet my expectations, or my own requirements aren't met?
- Do I ignore or disallow the sometimes unexpected ways in which God works to bring about his purpose?
- Do I perceive and value the gospel, God's power for salvation, as the revolutionary (leavening) agent of change that it truly is?

The Parables

Theme 1: The coming kingdom of God

Summary: The mustard seed, growing seed, leaven

- All these parables contrast the seemingly insignificant ministry/first appearing of Jesus with the coming of his reign in power and glory
- Growing seed: Mysteriousness yet certainty of the growth of the kingdom emphasized
- Mustard seed: Contrast between the smallness of the kingdom's beginnings and the vastness of its end emphasized
- Leaven: Hiddenness of God's power at work to bring about his kingdom emphasized