

## Parable of the Mustard Seed: Matthew 13:31-32

Read verses 31-32. Does anyone see a familiar phrase here that we spent a significant time on last Wednesday? “The Kingdom of Heaven is like....”

Does anyone remember what the 3 aspects it could be when the bible uses the term “Kingdom of Heaven”?

- **A present physical aspect to it:** Why? God is in charge RIGHT NOW and also in charge of ALL THE PHYSICAL WORLD.
- **A future eternal aspect:** Why? God is in charge of the FUTURE and in charge of ALL ETERNITY
- **A spiritual aspect to it:** Why? God is not only in charge of the PHYSICAL world, He is in charge of all things SPIRITUAL (which includes heaven, life after death, our souls, our spirits, etc)

In these parables, which of the 3 aspects is Jesus referring to? If unsure, let me ask where is this story occurring at? The stories are happening here on earth, so Jesus must be referring to the “present physical” aspect of heaven. **Who makes up the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth?** Churches, Christian organizations, and those doing Christian works.

This time, Jesus tells us a man took what kind of seed and planted in his field. A Mustard Seed. **Has anyone ever seen a mustard seed?** Show picture. This tiny seed can produce a large tree up to ten feet high.

At the very beginning of verse 32, Jesus gives an extra description of the mustard seed. **What’s he call the seed?** “the least of all seeds”. Why do you think Jesus would add this extra description in of the seed? Why didn’t he just leave it at “he planted a mustard seed”?

1. **Do you think everyone that ever would read this parable knows what a mustard seed was?**  
Jesus was not talking to botanical specialists. He wanted to make sure all are given the opportunity to understand the parable even if they had no idea what a mustard seed looked like, how big it was, or what kind of tree it produced. The least of all seeds implies it’s a seed that is very small and may seem insignificant in the scope of all the other “seeds” out there.
2. **If the seed represents the “Kingdom of Heaven here on earth”, why do you think Jesus would point out it starts out as “the least of all seeds”?** Christianity truly began when Christ came onto the scene. After His death and resurrection, everything changed and not everyone was on board when it started.
  - a. **Did Christianity start out with thousands of followers right off the bat? What does the book of Acts illustrate?** Jesus disciples bringing the Word throughout the land. Christianity was a new player in the scope of any existing religions including Judaism. It challenged and conflicted with all the other known religions of the time. It began as the least of these religions, but GREW and GREW in size and following because it is the only true and correct religion.
  - b. **Was Christianity immediately known throughout the entire world? What does the book of Acts illustrate?** From very small beginnings, the Gospel of Christ pervades all then nations of the world. This was done fairly rapidly, just as the mustard seed experiences rapid growth.

**We now come to a part of this parable that there are two competing views. Who do the birds of the air represent?** I can see both views as being possible. Neither view contradicts the rest of the bible and both views provide a valuable lesson. We will discuss both views:

1. **VIEW 1: The birds of the air represent false teachings or corruption that will occur and hide among the Kingdom of Heaven on earth as Christianity grows. What do you think about this view?**
  - a. In Matthew Chapter 13, Jesus gives us eight parables all within the same day. The first four are given at the same time in the same sitting. Take a quick look at the first parable in Matthew 13:3-9 in the parable of the Soils. **What do the “birds of the air” represent in verse 4?** These birds represent those who come and eat up the good seed. This is a representation of false doctrines or those who distort or destroy the message of Christ.
  - b. Close study of birds as symbols in the Old Testament and the literature of Judaism shows that birds regularly symbolize evil.
  - c. **In the second parable that we discussed last week, who did the enemies represent that came and sowed weeds in with the good seed?** These were also those that would come and bring false doctrines within the Kingdom of Heaven.
2. **VIEW 2: The birds of the air represent Gentiles participating in the Kingdom of God.**
  - a. **Abraham was a Jew but God promised ALL THE NATIONS would be blessed by him. Does ALL THE NATIONS only mean Jews? Or is salvation also promised to the GENTILES?** Of course Christ brings salvation to all people of the world and some believe that the birds of the air represent the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham.
  - b. **Read Hosea 14:7. What is Israel represented by in this verse?** A tree with others being blessed by living in its shadows.
  - c. **Dan 4:12 is often used to show that when the birds of the air is referenced, it doesn't always represent the “enemy” of “false doctrines”.** It is true that a tree is mentioned in this verse that the birds come and dwell in and feed off of, but this tree is a representation of King Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (which the entire dream is God telling the King his empire would fall and be replaced by another kingdom).

#### **My Opinion:**

- a. Because Jesus had just used “birds of the air” to represent the enemy in the same sitting, they represent the enemy and false teachings
- b. Because the first two (no arguments) of four parables deals with warnings of false doctrine and teachings within the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, I think there is strong evidence that Jesus would be using these last two parables in the same sitting as warnings against heresy in the church.
- c. The Daniel 4:12 argument for birds of the air not representing the enemy is weak because the tree in Daniel 4:12 is King Nebuchadnezzar and nothing to do with the Kingdom of Heaven.

#### **Parable of the Leaven: Matthew 13:33**

**Does anyone know what leaven is?** Leaven is also known as yeast. Yeast is the ingredient that makes bread rise. Bread was a staple meal item in ancient Jewish households.

**First, why did the Jews celebrate Passover?** This was the day that God delivered the Jewish people out of Egypt. He freed them from slavery and began their journey into their own land. **Why did the Jews only eat unleavened bread during Passover? First read Exodus 12:39.** The children of Israel left Egypt hastily and did not have time for the bread to rise, so the bread was made on that first Passover without leaven (yeast). **Next read Exodus 13:7-9.** This act of getting rid of all the leaven within their house and only eating unleavened bread was a commandment by God as an act of remembrance and appreciation for what God had done for Israel. Verse 8 even tells us that they would explain to their kids why they used unleavened bread.

Scientifically, leaven produces fermentation which is actually a decay process. Decay and death was a result of the great curse that sin brought upon the earth. The offerings of the priests and the Passover memorial had to be observed with unleavened bread.

**Now that we know the facts, lets look at the parable. Once again, there are two competing views on the meaning behind this parable. We will look at them both.**

**What do we have going on in this parable?** A woman (this part is not significant) is mixing up a meal and “hides” leaven (yeast) in the meal three different times.

**What is this meal that the woman is preparing? Let’s look at her ingredient amounts. What are the three quantities she is hiding the leaven in?** Three measures of meal. **Take a look at Leviticus 14:10.** In this, God is giving instructions on how the meat offering was to be prepared. **How much flour was to be used?** Three-tenths of fine flour. **In our parable, how much flour was the woman adding to the meal? What kind of meal was she preparing?** The woman was evidently preparing an offering.

**What was God’s law concerning adding leaven to any offering?** This was against the Jewish law. No leaven was to be used in offerings.

It is useful to note that leaven is nearly always a symbol of evil in scripture.

The two competing views of this parable come in when we examine what exactly the “leaven” or “yeast” represents. It does state that she is “hiding” this leaven unknowingly to others within the meal.

**a. VIEW ONE DISCUSSION:**

- a. **What do you immediately think about her doing this secretly?** It seems sneaky, or maybe wrong to be doing this.
- b. **If this was a woman making up a food offering to God, and it was against God’s law to have leaven in it, what do you think about her hiding this leaven in it?**
- c. **Lastly, this hiding of leaven eventually makes what? (The very last part of verse 33):** The whole batch was leavened. The leaven quietly spread and permeated all that it contacted.
- d. This first view sees this as a warning same as the other three parables. If leaven was against God’s law and she was adding it secretly to the offering, then the leaven would be tainting or corrupting the offering.
- e. **Jesus Christ is our Passover, our savior, and if his work was the batch, what would the leaven represent?** Those that corrupt the true word. Once again a warning about false doctrines.

- f. As the Kingdom of Heaven grows here on earth, the possibility of corruption does too. Luke tells us that the true children of God are a “little flock” surrounded by wolves.
- b. VIEW TWO DISCUSSION:**
  - a. The second view sees the leaven as something that is not evil. It represents the kingdom of God, multiplying and quietly taking hold of all that it touches.

**My Opinion: VIEW ONE**

- a. With all the references to leaven in the bible as a negative or evil thing, and the fact that this would be an offering this woman is making that should not have leaven in it, it seems that the leaven would be evil.
- b. Because the first two (no arguments) of four parables deals with warnings of false doctrine and teachings within the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and if you do add parable three as the same, I think there is strong evidence that Jesus would be using this last parable in the same sitting as warnings against heresy in the church.
- c. The woman doing this secretly seems shady. Christianity did not grow in silence and sneakily. It grew with power and authority for all to see and experience.

**SUMMARY:**

- a. Both Groups: See the growing mustard seed and batch of meal as the rapid expansion of Christianity throughout the world.
- b. Group One: These two parables represent the eventual conversion of the whole world through evangelism. This view seems to contradict other verses in the bible because Jesus tells us that “the way is narrow and few will find it”. There are also some belief systems out there that believe Jesus came to die for everyone whether they choose to follow and believe Him or not.
- c. Group Two: These two parables is a warning against false doctrines and teachings within Kingdom of God here on earth.

**I believe group two is the best explanation for this parable. What are your guys opinions?**