

Hidden Hills Sovereign Grace Baptist Church
Sunday Sermon

Date: October 3, 2021

Text: Matthew 13:31-33

Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:31-33

Subject: The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in the meal

In the preceding message from Matthew 13:24-43, we considered The parable of the tares in the wheat.

The seven parables of Matt. 13 divide into four and three, which is the usual division of a series of seven. The first four were spoken to the multitude on the seashore, the last three to the disciples inside the house. The first four give us the external view in the history of Christendom, while the last three show us that which is more internal and spiritual.

Matthew 13:31-32 (KJV) *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: 32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*

As we can see, the Lord gave no further explanation of this parable. Jesus spoke this parable to the multitude as well as to his disciples before sending the multitude away and going into the house where his disciples followed him.

As we shall see, both Mark and Luke also record the parable of the Mustard Seed.

Mark 4:30-32 (KJV) *And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: 32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*

Luke 13:18-19 (KJV) *Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? 19 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.*

What is the meaning of this parable of the Mustard Seed? How can we be sure? In reading most all of the commentators, I can say their opinions are that the mustard seed represents the gospel, the church, or the kingdom. In their view, it began small (like the mustard seed) and eventually would finish with the world-wide kingdom of Christ. Overall, that is the general picture, but does it explain the parable?

Our understanding of this parable hinges upon a correct interpretation of its three central figures: the mustard-seed, the great tree which sprang from it, and the "*birds of the air*" which came and lodged in its branches. What does each represent?

Most commentators have made this and the parable of the leaven in the meal to mean the very opposite of what the Lord Jesus taught. The main cause of this erroneous interpretation can undoubtedly be traced back to a wrong understanding of the expression "*kingdom of heaven*."

The popular and current explanation of these parables is that they were meant to announce the glorious success of the Gospel. Thus, that of the mustard-seed is regarded as portraying the rapid extension of Chris-

tianity and the expansion of the Church of Christ. Beginning insignificantly and obscurely, its proportions have increased immensely, until ultimately it shall cover the earth. Let us first show how untenable and impossible this interpretation is:

First, we need to remember that these seven parables form part of one connected and complete discourse whose teaching must necessarily be consistent and harmonious throughout. Therefore, it is obvious that this third one cannot conflict with the teaching of the first two. In the first parable (the parable of the sower), instead of drawing a picture of a field in which the good Seed took root and flourished in every part of it, our Lord pointed out that most of its soil was unfavorable, and that only a fractional proportion bore an increase. Moreover, instead of promising that the good-ground section of the field would yield greater and greater returns, He announced that there would be a decreasing harvest--"*some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*" In the second parable (the parable of the tares among the wheat), our Lord revealed the field as over-sown with "*tares*," and declared that these should continue until the harvest-time, which He defined as the end of the age." This fixes beyond all doubt the evil consequences of the Enemy's work, and positively forbids the expectation of a world won to Christ during this present age. Christ plainly warned us that the evil effects of the Devil's labors at the beginning of the age would never be repaired. The crop as a whole is spoiled! Thus this third parable cannot teach that the failure of things in the hands of men will be removed and reversed.

Second, the figure here selected by Christ should at once expose the fallacy of the popular interpretation. Surely our Lord would never have taken a mustard-seed which afterwards became a "tree," ever rooting itself deeper and deeper in the earth, to portray that people whose calling, hope, citizenship, and destiny is *heavenly*. Again and again He affirmed that His people were "*not of the world.*" Again, a great tree with its towering branches speaks of prominence and loftiness, but

lowliness and suffering, not prominence and exaltation, are the present portion of the New Testament saints. The more any church of Christ climbs the ladder of worldly fame the more it sinks spiritually. That which is represented by this "tree" is not a people who are "*strangers and pilgrims*" on the earth, but a system whose roots lie deeply in the earth and which aims at greatness and expansion in this present world.

Third, that which Christ here describes is a monstrosity. We are aware that this is denied by some, but our Lord's own words are final. He tells us that when this mustard-seed is grown it is the "*greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree*" (v. 32). "*Herbs*" are an entirely different species from trees. That which distinguished them is that their stems never develop woody tissue but live only long enough for the development of flowers and seeds. But this "*herb*" became a "*tree*;" that is to say, it developed into something entirely foreign to its very nature and constitution.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the noun "**Herb**" with these words: "A plant of which the stem does not become woody and persistent (as in a shrub or a tree) but remains more or less soft and succulent, and dies down to the ground (or entirely) after flowering." By this definition of an herb, we can see that it is an annual and not a perennial plant.

Whereas, the *OED* defines a **tree** as: "A perennial plant having a self-supporting woody main stem or *trunk* (which usually develops woody branches at some distance from the ground), and growing to a considerable height and size. (Usually distinguished from a bush or shrub by size and manner of growth.)

How strange that sober men should have deemed this unnatural growth, this abnormal production, a fitting symbol of the saints of God in their corporate form – in the church or in the kingdom!

Some tell us that the soil of Palestine is a most congenial one for the growth of mustard, and that it is quite common for it to develop into goodly-sized shrubs. But cannot the very ones who teach this as an objection to the pre-millennial interpretation of this parable see that it forms an argument against what they contend for? Clearly the "*field*," all through Matt. 13, is the world. Is, then, "*the world*" a favorable place for the growth of that kingdom which Christ solemnly and expressly said was "*not of this world*" (John 18:36)? Is this world, where the flesh and the Devil unite in opposing all that concerns Christ and His interests, a agreeable soil for Christianity? Either the world must cease to be what it is—"the enemy of God"—or the Seed must change its character, before the one will be favorable to the other – and we know that will not happen. And this is just what our parable does teach: the "*herb*" becomes a "*tree*."

Fourth, the "*birds*" lodging in the branches of this tree makes altogether against the current interpretation. If Scripture be compared with Scripture it will be found that these "*birds*" symbolize Satan and his agents. What is the meaning of these birds or fowls? We need not go outside the kingdom parables for the answer.

In the first parable, the parable of the sower, we are told "And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the **fowls** came and devoured them up." (Mat. 13:4). In the Lord's explanation of the parable of the sower in verses 18-23, we read this about the seed which fell on the wayside: "*When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the **wicked one**, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart...*" (Mat. 13:19). In this, we see that the LORD taught us that the fowls of verse 4 are the wicked one in verse 19. This is the key to understanding the "birds or fowls" that lodge in the branches of the mustard seed which became a great tree.

Let us now consider a scriptural figure for a great tree (there are others):

Daniel 4:10-12 (KJV) *Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. 11 The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: 12 The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it...*

Daniel 4:20-22 (KJV) *The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; 21 Whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: 22 It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.*

Thus we see in this example of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon that trees often symbolize great men – kings and princes and their influence in this present earth.

The cause of Christ on earth was so uninfluential and insignificant, it was an object of intense hatred to Satan. Against those of “that way” he vented the full force of his fiendish malignity. Every weapon in his arsenal was employed in the effort to exterminate it. He stirred up men in authority and moved emperors to issue cruel edicts. Property was confiscated, Christians captured, imprisoned, fined, tortured, slain. Mercilessly and ceaselessly did the Devil seek to blot out the name of Christ from the earth. But the more it was persecuted, the more

Christianity flourished. As one of the early "*fathers*" put it, "*The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.*"

Finding that force was of no avail, the Enemy changed his tactics. Failing to intimidate as the roaring lion, he now sought to insinuate as the subtle serpent. Ceasing to attack from without, he now worked from within. In the first parable the assault was from without—the fowls of the air (the wicked one) catching away the Seed. In the second parable his activities were from within— he sowed his tares among the wheat. In the third parable we are shown the effects of this. Satan now moved worldly men to seek membership in the churches of God. These soon caused the faith once for all delivered to the saints to be watered down, discipline to be relaxed, that which repelled the world to be kept in the background, and what would appeal to the carnal mind to be made prominent. Instead of affections being set upon things above, they were fixed on things below. Soon Christianity ceased to be hated by the unregenerate (the unsaved): the gulf between the world and the "*Church*" was bridged.

Persecution ceased, and the professed cause of the despised and rejected Saviour became popular. The distinctive truths of Christianity were abandoned, the Gospel was adulterated, the pilgrim character of professing saints ceased. More and more the wise and great of this world were attracted. By the fourth century the heads of the Roman Empire, instead of hating Christianity, perceived that it was a power for moral good in the governing of men, and so espoused it. In the days of Constantine the so-called Church and the State united, and became a vast political-religious system which the Apostle John called MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (Rev. 17:5). Mind you, the courts of Caesar had not changed their character, nor become like the little "*upper room*" in Jerusalem, where the lowly church of Christ, small as a grain of mustard, first assembled. It was **professing Christianity** which had changed. The

lowly upper room had long been forsaken, and the honors of kings' courts coveted. And God granted their fleshly desire.

Under these changed circumstances professing Christianity soon became great in the earth. Caves and caverns as places of worship gave place to costly church houses and ornate cathedrals. The ritual was celebrated with a corresponding pomp. Its gorgeous vestments, its imposing ceremonies, its pompous priesthood, all lured the unregenerate; and multitudes applied for baptism. More and more the leaders sought after temporal power, and more and more were their longings gratified. In consequence, worldly-minded men were the ones who sought after and secured the highest offices. Hence we find the "*birds*," the agents of Satan, lodging in the branches of the "*tree*"; they secured the positions of power and directed the activities of professing Christendom.

Thus we may discern in the first three parables of Matt. 13 a striking and sad forecast of the development of evil. In the first, the Devil caught away part of the good Seed. In the second, he is seen engaged in the work of imitation. Here, in the third, we are shown a corrupted Christianity affording him shelter. These "birds" are found in Catholicism, the protestant daughters and grand-daughters and among many professing Baptists. Still, if we are to find the LORD's "little flock," we shall find that "little flock" among the Baptists.

Let us now consider the 4th parable, that of the leaven hidden by a woman in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.

Matthew 13:33 (KJV) *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Luke 13:20-21 (KJV) *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

The interpretation of the parable of the **Leaven** ([Mt 13:33](#)) which makes the leaven to be the Gospel (with some variation), introduced into the world ("three measures of meal") by the church, and working subtly until the world is converted ("till the whole was leavened") is not the correct understanding of this parable.

(1) it does violence to the unvarying symbolical meaning of leaven, and especially to the meaning fixed by our Lord Himself.

(a) **Matthew 16:6-12 (KJV)** *Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the **leaven** of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. **7** And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. **8** Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? **9** Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? **10** Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? **11** How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the **leaven** of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? **12** Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the **leaven** of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

Mark 8:15 (KJV) *And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the **leaven** of the Pharisees, and of the **leaven** of Herod.*

(2) The implication of a converted world in this age ("till the whole was leavened"), is explicitly contradicted by our Lord's interpretation of the parables of the Wheat and Tares, and of the Net. Our Lord presents a picture of a partly converted kingdom in an unconverted world; of good fish and bad in the very kingdom-net itself. We will, as the Lord enables us, consider the 7th parable of the net which gathers of every kind.

(3) The method of the extension of the kingdom is given in the first parable. It is by sowing seed, not by mingling leaven. The symbols have, in Scripture, a meaning fixed by inspired usage – which is the very best way we can be sure of the meaning. Leaven is the principle of corruption working subtly; leaven is invariably used in a bad sense and is defined by our Lord as evil doctrine as we see from the passages quoted. Meal, on the contrary, was used in one of the sweet-savour offerings and was food for the priests.

Leviticus 2:1-3 (KJV) *And when any will offer a meat offering unto the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon: 2 And he shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests: and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof; and the priest shall burn the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: 3 And the remnant of the meat offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire.*

Leviticus 6:15-17 (KJV) *And he shall take of it his handful, of the flour of the meat offering, and of the oil thereof, and all the frankincense which is upon the meat offering, and shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour, even the memorial of it, unto the LORD. 16 And the remainder thereof shall Aaron and his sons eat: with unleavened bread shall it be eaten in the holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation they shall eat it. 17 It shall not be baken with leaven. I have given it unto them for their portion of my offerings made by fire; it is most holy, as is the sin offering, and as the trespass offering.*

A woman, in the bad ethical sense, always symbolizes something out of place. In Thyatira it was a woman teaching.

Revelation 2:20 (KJV) *Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*

The Harlot Church is symbolized by a woman.

Revelation 17:1-6 (KJV) *And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: **2** With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. **3** So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. **4** And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: **5** And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. **6** And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.*

Interpreting the parable by these familiar symbols, it constitutes a warning that the true doctrine, given for nourishment of the children of the kingdom has been being polluted over the ages since the beginning of the church.

Matthew 4:4 (KJV) *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

1 Timothy 4:6 (KJV) *If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.*

1 Peter 2:2 (KJV) *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:*

As we can see, the good word would be mingled with corrupt and corrupting false doctrine, and that officially, by the apostate church itself.

1 Timothy 4:1-3 (KJV) *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*

2 Timothy 2:17 (KJV) *And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;*

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (KJV) *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

2 Peter 2:1-3 (KJV) *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. 3 And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose*

judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Thus, we see that both the parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven in the Meal show us something of the false doctrine which has been and is still being introduced into the churches by false teachers. Even if they are not actual members of the Lord's church, their presentations, articles, sermons, and books are like the leaven which continues to leaven the meal until it is entirely leavened – corrupted. Let us remember that we “live not by bread alone, but by every word of God.” Thanks be to God that we have it in the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Dozens and dozens of corrupt translations and paraphrases of the Bible have been used to corrupt the word of God. God help us to believe and keep what we have – a bible whose underlying texts have been used by the Lord's churches (not either the Roman or Greek Catholics and protestants) for more than 2000 years.

It is more than sufficient! We believe and are assured that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God—Matt. 4:4. We are persuaded – yea, more than persuaded, that we have every word of God in our King James Version of the Holy Bible!