

sinking ship or sovereignly secure?

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[0 : 00] Dork changed. Never mind. Plenty of verses. Okay, let's turn to our Bibles and to Matthew's Gospel chapter 13. If you have one of our Vista's Bibles, that is page 818, I think. Is that right?

It is, yeah. Matthew 13, and again we're going to read in two places. First of all, a longish section from verses 24 through to 43, and then a little bit more, the paragraph beginning at verse 47. And Andy will explain why later on. Jesus put another parable before them, saying, The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds? And he said to them, An enemy has done this. So the servant said to him, then, Do you want us to go and gather them? But he said, No, less than gathering the weeds, you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

At the harvest time, I will tell the reapers to gather the weeds first and bind them into bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn. 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's the smallest of all seeds, but when it's grown, it's larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and make their nests in its branches. He told them another parable. Kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened. All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables.

[2 : 24] Indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill 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.

Then he left the crowds and went into the house, and his disciples came to him, saying, Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field. He answered, The one who sows the good seed is the son of man.

The field is the world, and the good seed is the children of the kingdom. And weeds are the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil.

The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age.

The son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace.

[3 : 33] In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.

He who has ears, let him hear. Verse 47, again, The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.

When it was full, man drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw away the bad. And so it will be at the close of the age.

The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the fiery furnace. And in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Amen. Well, please do have Matthew chapter 13 open in front of you, and let me just pray for us as we, as you turn that up.

[4 : 43] Lord, we've just sung that all our knowledge, sense and sight, lie in deepest darkness shrouded. And that is so true. We, even our best efforts cannot make sense to the world around us without your help.

And we pray now as we open your word, that you would show us clearly what you are doing at work in this world, and that you'd comfort our hearts and encourage us. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Divisions in the church, the relentless attack of the liberal elite, Christian principles being continually undermined, the Eighth Amendment being repealed in Ireland, the rise of Islam in the West, teenagers seemingly abandoning the church in droves, sheer apathy in response to any attempt at sharing the gospel.

It begs the question, doesn't it? Is God's kingdom a sinking ship? Or is it far more secure than it might appear on the surface?

I imagine Jesus' followers could have made their own list of discouragements, things that they found perplexing, that didn't seem to line up with their expectations of what God's coming kingdom would look like.

[6:08] Why are the religious leaders trying to discredit Jesus? Why are some people not responding to the gospel when we share it with them? Why isn't God's kingdom gathering speed like we hoped it would?

When we look at the world without Jesus' explanation, these issues can cause real confusion and be very disheartening to any follower of Christ.

But Jesus says in verse 35 that he will open his mouth in parables and utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

In other words, without Jesus' explanation about how the kingdom grows in the world, we would never arrive at these trees that he shares with us in the parables by ourselves.

He will utter what has been hidden. He will reveal what was once not knowable by man's feeble mind. Jesus says that we could never look at the world around us without his explanation and arrive at the truths that he shares with us here.

[7:14] So what is it that Jesus reveals to us in these parables? How does he correct our thinking about what God's coming kingdom in this world looks like? Well, let's first look at the parable of the weeds and the wheat first, where Jesus teaches us that God's kingdom is opposed, but God is thoroughly in control.

That's looking at verses 24 to 30 and then the explanation from verse 36. Firstly, Jesus says that his kingdom is going to be opposed, verses 24 to 26.

Jesus says the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And Jesus explains the first part of this parable in verses 36 to 39.

It says, So the kingdom of heaven is opposed for now.

[9:15] In this world, according to Jesus, not everything is going to go from strength to strength in the church. Jesus is at work, yes, but Satan is at work too.

That's why some people don't become Christians who come along to Christianity Explored. That's why some of our evangelistic events are sometimes a bit of a flop.

That's why some people stop coming along to church who you thought were Christians. And Jesus says that will cause his servants to be absolutely baffled.

But the servants in the parable were expecting only wheat to grow in the field, weren't they? Verse 27. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

How then does it have weeds? They're utterly confused. What we see happening in the world, the results not matching what we would expect, will leave us utterly confused unless we listen to Jesus' teaching.

[10:20] For if you expect the whole world to submit themselves to Jesus' teaching, then you don't have the same realistic expectations that Jesus says that we should have.

Now, that doesn't mean that we should be nihilistic and say people are either going to be weeds or wheat, and there's very little we can do about that. No, we must take our responsibility seriously. We must pray for the events we put on as a church, and we must go after the believer who is straying and try to warmly win them back. But it also means that when we don't see success like we expect, we shouldn't be surprised or allow it to rock our faith.

Jesus has taught us that the kingdom will be opposed right from the day he inaugurated it back in his first coming all the way through to the point when he returns. But that doesn't mean that God isn't in the driving seat.

The world isn't spinning more and more out of control with God struggling to hold things together. We don't serve a weak and helpless God, and we don't fight against an enemy who can match our God.

[11 : 32] God and Satan are not engaged in some kind of cosmic arm wrestle, which is poised on the edge of a knife. They are not equals. God has his enemy right where he wants him, but holds off landing the finishing blow for now.

But again, just looking at the world, you would not naturally arrive at that perspective, would you? So why does God not land that finishing blow now and make an end to all those who oppose him? For that's what the servant suggests, isn't it, in verse 28, in verse 29, 30, sorry. The man who owns the field says, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.

Jesus says that he's not going to deal with those who oppose his kingdom now, for in so doing he would in some way be detrimental to the church.

[12 : 45] But if God acted now and dealt with the weeds before the harvest, the last day, then in some way it would negatively impact on the harvest of the wheat at the end.

God knows what is best, not us. And he always acts in line with what is best for his kingdom and his people. However, all that we will see on the surface is weed-infested chaos.

We will not see that perspective. We will never come to that conclusion that God is in control, but patiently waiting for the benefit of his church. 2 Peter 3, verse 9 says, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

God is not slow, and he is not impotent. No, rather he is patient, and in his wisdom, he has chosen to allow the two kingdoms to grow side by side in the meantime.

And only at harvest time will he then separate them. At harvest time, the yield of wheat, God's people, will be all the greater because of his patient waiting.

[14 : 05] If we listen to Jesus, he can turn our confusion into clarity. We're going to face a lot of mess and muddle, a lot of confusion and questions, opposition and turmoil, according to this parable, all the way through this age.

But we needn't be discouraged. Read with me from verse 40. 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 all causes of sin and all lawbreakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears, let him hear. God knows exactly what is going on in his field, the world, and he will make everything right in time.

Those things I mentioned at the beginning, divisions, liberalism, you could add to them, post-truth worldviews. God knows about them, and he is thoroughly in control.

[15 : 19] One day his kingdom will be fully established, and be completely unopposed. But we have to wait until then. Well, a second point for today.

God's kingdom looks unimpressive, but will one day fill the earth. Looking at verses 31 to 33. Jesus 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.

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. Jesus sandwiches these two small parables between the parable of the wheat and weeds and the explanation to add further colour to what he has been saying.

These two parables are similar to the parable of the wheat and the weeds, but also slightly different. If the discouragement with the parable of the wheat and the weeds was that the kingdom is

opposed now and the encouragement that one day it won't be, then a discouragement with these two parables is that the kingdom looks rather unimpressive now and that it won't really amount to anything, but the encouragement is that one day it will.

[17 : 00] Like the parable of the wheat and the weeds, you wouldn't be able to come to this conclusion without God's gracious revelation. You might think by looking at the divisions in the church and the decline of the churches in the West that God's kingdom is on a downward trajectory from here on out, but it isn't.

Think of a mustard seed. It's one of the smallest seeds. It's hard to imagine that an enormous plant will come from such humble beginnings.

You may know the saying, mighty oaks from little acorns grow. That's exactly the concept that Jesus expresses in this parable. Now, I have a very lucid memory from when I was a six or seven year old boy and on a walk in the forest behind my grandparents' house with my granddad.

And I remember a conversation I had with him. My granddad was telling me we were stood underneath a massive oak tree and he lifted up this small acorn and said to me, Andrew, do you know this oak tree came from something as small as this little acorn?

And my granddad often pulled my leg. So I remember laughing at him and thought, that's absolutely absurd. That's so incredible. It's so impossible. And even when I think about it now, when I think of a tiny acorn and a massive oak tree, I still find it absolutely baffling that something so large and so majestic like an oak tree could come from such tiny beginnings.

[18 : 39] It's very peculiar, isn't it? It's baffling. But it does happen. And Jesus says, so it is with his kingdom. You might be worried that it doesn't look like anything impressive could come about from what looks so unimpressive now, a divided church that's trampled on in the media.

But one day, it will be the biggest tree in the forest and birds from all over will flock in and make it their home. Jesus' disciples must have questioned how this kingdom would fill the whole earth when people are rejecting it left, right, and center.

And we might think the same today. Even more so, perhaps, because it appears to us like the glory days of the church are far behind us, not before us here in the UK.

But mighty oaks from little acorns do grow. And think of the second parable. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures till a flower, till it was all leavened.

Equally, what is as unimpressive as a tiny mustard seed? Answer? Another, incy-wincy, microscopic, slightly smelly bacteria.

[19 : 59] Leaven or yeast. But isn't the astounding thing about baking bread that when you put this stuff in your flour and your water and add a pinch of salt, although I hear that actually retards the growth of the yeast by my baking friends, out comes this enormous loaf.

It permeates all through the whole dough. But you can't obviously see that work in action. It works quite covertly and quite secretly, doesn't it?

You cannot see the yeast multiplying. So it is with God's kingdom. Jesus says, give it some time and what seems unimpressive and not likely to amount to anything, microscopic even, will one day be impressive, all that there is and totally visible.

one day the whole earth will be filled with the kingdom of God. God's plan from the beginning of creation to spread his kingdom from Eden to the very far corners of the earth will one day come to final fruition.

But what this parable doesn't try to teach us is the mechanism by which that happens. That's the thing about seeds and yeast. how they work is somewhat mysterious.

[21 : 21] And imagine that the mechanism by which they grew would have been even more mysterious in Jesus' day when microscopes and plant botany weren't as advanced as they are today.

Jesus is not promising a certain rate of growth and he certainly isn't promising no setbacks along the way. The parable of the wheat and the weeds taught us that much.

After all yeast multiplies exponentially whereas seed from my experience tends to grow quite fast at the start and then somewhat taper off.

So he's definitely not giving us a formula so that we can track the growth of his kingdom the church in the world. We can't plot a graph and work out when the kingdom will be fully established.

He doesn't intend to give us that much detail. Rather he simply wants us to trust him and to know that what looks so unimpressive now will one day fill the earth and people from every tribe tongue and nation will be drawn into it.

[22 : 29] The kingdom will come in its fullness at the end and he is discreetly at work making that happen now. That's what he wants us to know. You know I think that matches with our reality.

I think that is our experience. When people ask me how things are going at Tron Kelvin Grove where we go as a family in the morning I say yes we're encouraged.

People aren't flooding in to hear the gospel but we are seeing them come in in drips and drabs. Sometimes there seems to not be many new people at all for a few weeks but then a new family will come.

A new worker will arrive in the city and make the Tron Kelvin Grove their home in the morning. But you know that might not always be the case. Even if Tron Kelvin Grove that site was the fail or Queen's Park or any of the sites for that matter it wouldn't undermine Jesus' words would it?

But the kingdom does not necessarily have to be growing much where we are for it to be growing in the world as a whole. You only need to hear the stories of the great work God is doing amongst Iranians both here and the world over or the Han Chinese to recognise that God is seriously at work covertly in this world bringing about his purposes bringing about his kingdom even though at the moment it doesn't seem like there's a great work going on here just drips and drabs.

[24 : 04] So the lesson is though the church may look like the underdog now don't write it off don't give up on the kingdom because it doesn't look like it's amounting to something for it will do and even now God is discreetly at work adding people to his kingdom.

Well let's look at a final parable and a final heading God's kingdom will arrive fully but not all will be welcomed in looking at verses 47 to 50 Jesus says again the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind when it was full men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad so it will be at the end of the age the angels will come and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth all the parables we've looked at this evening have had both the present and the future in sight but the only way to think rightly about the here and now is to think of it in light of what is to come in the future clarity only comes to this muddled up now and not yet age this kingdom coming but not yet fully here age by looking ahead at what is to come and the only way we can know that is to trust in

Jesus words this last parable more so than the others has this end day particularly in view for though it has a lot in common with the parable the wheat and the weeds good seed and bad seed been replaced by good fish and bad fish and the bad the weeds were cast into the fire there is a subtle difference the parable of the wheat and the weeds focuses primarily on the mixing of the good and the bad during this age and is more brief about that final separation whereas the parable of the net has its primary focus on that final separation at the end of the age and what this parable teaches us is that there will be a day in the future where God gathers all humanity and sorts them into two groups the righteous and the wicked those who have humbled themselves and submitted to

Jesus' rule and those who as we saw last week would rather remain willfully blind the world will not be a muddled place forever one day we will know exactly who belongs to Jesus and who doesn't there will be no more umming and ahring no more confusion and there are only two possible outcomes depending on what group you're sorted into the good fish are sorted into containers and belong to the fishermen whereas the bad will be thrown into the fiery furnace now that is either a great comfort to you or a great terror depending on how you've responded to Jesus and his coming kingdom if you've responded rightly to Jesus and received his righteousness by faith then what a joy to finally meet him face to face and see his kingdom finally ushered in that you've longed for all your life where there are no more tears no more slander no more belittling words aimed at you for belonging to

Jesus all wrongs made right as God judges justly and rids the world of all evil and all opposition altogether what a joy it will be to see his kingdom fully established that we so long to see now a kingdom fully unopposed and fully established but how terrible the alternative you may have said all your life that you want nothing to do with God don't want to hear what he has to say rejected his words made even maybe even made his people feel quite small about following him well on that last day you will see that reality come to full fruition in the here and now you may want nothing to do

with God but you still benefit greatly from God's good gifts to his world food family health friendship beauty music art shelter but one day even those good things that you enjoy in this world will be stripped away from you you'll find that you didn't really mean what you'd said all your life through existence without

[29 : 09] God and all his gracious blessings is a terrible thing lonely painful joyless resentful existence deplete of all meaning purpose and hope that's what the Bible means when it talks about hell so that is you can I urge you to respond to Jesus words in verse 43 he who has ears let him hear don't let these words wash over you don't put your fingers in your ears because you don't like thinking about such weighty things we're all like that none of us like thinking about these things there will be a great day of sorting and judgment and how you respond to Jesus now will determine your future destiny and as we looked at last week the more of a habit you make of rejecting God's words the harder it will be for you to respond to him rightly so and respond to him rightly tonight well as we close just a reminder that you would never arrive at these truths by just observing the world around us you would think that

God's kingdom is on the ropes as the enemy starts to show boat you would never think that we are part of an enterprise that will one day fill the entire planet but Jesus says that God will deal with his enemies in the future and usher in his perfect kingdom fully it is certain he's been right about everything else in the gospels hasn't he he was right that he would raise Lazarus from the dead that Judas would betray him that he would be crucified buried and rise again from the dead so I think we can trust him and what he is saying happen in the future and allow what is still to come to shape how we perceive the present and keep us working for him now rather than becoming disheartened God's kingdom is not a sinking ship it is sovereignly secure and God is utterly in control of everything to o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o