

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KINGDOM

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Matthew 13:31-33

1. Today we are going to examine two short parables Jesus told the crowds.
 2. As pointed out previously these parables are referred to as, “Kingdom Parables.”
 3. Jesus did not explain these parables to His disciples as He did the previous ones we have studied. (At least we do not have a record of His doing so.)
 - b. They are descriptive of that which calls itself the kingdom of God during this age.
 - c. They illustrate the difference between “Christendom” (organization) and “Christianity (organism).
- NOTE: Many identify with Christendom, but you must be born again to become part of that which is truly Christianity.
5. The popular interpretation of these parables is that they illustrate:
 - a. The amazing growth of the church from its small beginning.
 - b. The growing, and eventual, victorious influence of the church upon the world.
 6. There is a measure of truth in both of these ideas.
 - a. No one can deny that the growth of the early church was miraculous.
 - b. No one can deny that the message of the church has profoundly influenced our world and human history.
 - c. Yet, it is equally evident, that when compared to false religion, true Christianity is in the minority.
 - d. Also, the influence of the true church, has not leavened the whole lump of humanity.
 7. So what was Jesus trying to teach in these two parables?

I. The Parable of the Mustard Seed.

- A. I believe this parable describes the outward, visible development of Christendom (that which calls itself Christianity) in the world.
- B. Jesus, the Son of God, came and sowed a mustard seed.
- C. On the Day of Pentecost that which Jesus planted was represented by 120 people in the Upper Room. (Acts 1:15)
- D. Even though the early church enjoyed great success, and impacted the entire Roman Empire, it remained primarily an organism until the time of Constantine in the third century.
- E. When Constantine outwardly embraced Christianity the visible church became an organization, and since that day all sorts of birds have come to nest in its branches.
 1. In the Parable of the Sower the birds mentioned had an evil connotation; they represented the Devil.
 2. Jesus was speaking of abnormal growth, not supernatural growth, because a mustard seed, though small, does not become a tree.
- F. G. Campbell Morgan provided a good summary of the abnormal growth, of what is called the church, that occurred due to Constantine’s espousal of Christianity.

“That was the darkest day that dawned in all history of the Church. His (Constantine’s) espousal of Christianity was an astute and clever political move and he grafted upon Christianity much of paganism, and elevated it to a position of worldly power, and in that hour the whole church passed under the blight from which it has never completely escaped. That is the whole sin and wrong of the Papacy, domination done in the name of Christ, the

claiming of power to rule over kings, emperors, and rulers and dictate terms to them; a great tree spreading its branches. That spirit remains in every attempt, even today, to realize the divine purpose by high organization, vested power. It is not a good thing. It is abnormal growth.”

G. For hundreds of years the true church was despised and persecuted by that which calls itself the Church.

H. Today we see all kinds of birds nesting in the tree called Christendom—Christian Science, Jehovah Witnesses, the Unity School of Christianity, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Catholicism, and various Christian denominations and churches that have abandoned the truth, “which was once for all handed down to the saints.” (Jude 3)

I. Here Jesus was identifying a problem rather than making a promise.

II. The Parable of the Leaven.

A. Here we have a parable that illustrates the inner, doctrinal corruption of the truth of the Gospel and the Word of God.

B. The Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and Tares make it clear that the Gospel is never going to leaven the whole lump of humanity.

C. Herbert Lockyer pointed out that the words “leaven” and “unleavened” are used seventy-one times in the Old Testament and 17 times in the New Testament referring to that which is evil.

NOTE: This is Lockyer’s observation, but the point is that leaven is rarely used in a positive sense in the Bible.

D. Jesus always used the word in a negative sense.

1. “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees... Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matthew 16:6, 12

a. The Pharisees represented legalism and religious formalism.

b. The Sadducees represented skepticism and rationalism.

2. “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” Mark 8:15

NOTE: The leaven of Herod refers to the marriage of religion to worldliness and worldly power.

3. “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

a. False doctrine.

b. Teaching one thing and doing another.

QUESTION: Why would Jesus confuse His disciples by giving leaven a positive meaning as some suggest?

E. The Apostle Paul used the word leaven in a negative sense.

1. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

2. Galations 5:7-9

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.

NOTE: Here Paul was dealing with false teachers that were spreading their false teaching (leaven) in the churches of Galatia.

F. Notice that the woman hid the leaven.

1. In Revelation 17:1 this world's false religious system is characterized by a woman.
2. In Galatians 2:4 Paul wrote of, "false brethren who had sneaked in.
3. Peter wrote the following in 2 Peter 2:1-3.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

4. Jude also warned his readers in Jude 3-4.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. 4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

G. So here we have Jesus warning us that the true Church, and every genuine Christian, will have to contend with the Enemy's constant attempts to corrupt the Word of God and the message of the Gospel

APPLICATION

1. All that refers to itself as an expression of Christianity is not an expression of true Christianity.
2. All that refers to itself as Truth is not an expression of The Truth.
3. A genuine Christian is a person who has been impacted by the Gospel through the convicting and enlightening power of the Holy Spirit leading to repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. The Truth is what God declares The Truth to be, and that Truth can be understood and applied only through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: Many declare truth to be relative, and in some areas that is not a big problem, but where God and His Word are concerned it is a problem because being wrong has serious consequences.