

Matthew 13:24-58 | “The Surprising Nature of God’s Kingdom”

Preached on October 1, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 13, and we will be starting in verse 24. *[pause]*

We are in the kingdom parables of Jesus here in Matthew 13.

We just learned the parable of the sower last week, and now we will finish out the chapter, which has several more parables. *[pauseeee]*

One time, someone bought my son a terrarium.

It was this small container that you put rocks and dirt in the bottom, planted seeds, watered it, and then put the lid on. *[pause]*

I remember when we finally finished putting the seeds in and watering it, my son was surprised that nothing happened right away. *[pause]*

I think he was expecting to watch it grow instantly, but of course, it doesn’t work like that.

Seeds take time to grow. [pause]

Aren’t we like that in regards to many things in life?

We are impatient people with grand expectations.

We always seem to expect and desire things to be big and fast. *[pause]*

We are results-oriented people, who get frustrated if things aren’t successful when and how we expect them to be.

We like impressive looking things and disregard the small things of life. *[pauseeee]*

Take, for instance, church.

There is a whole church growth industry that shapes our expectations to think that every church, if they just follow their steps, will just be bursting at the seams in no time at all.

And if we don’t see that immediate growth, we think: ‘failure’. [pause]

Or maybe it’s change in your life.

You start working out and eating right, and it’s only been 2 weeks, and you expect to have lost 20 pounds already. *[pause]*

Or you begin reading your Bible and praying more, and expect to be this ultra godly person who has overcome all of their sin struggles after a week of doing that. *[pauseeee]*

Our minds seem to continually expect immediate results.

We always are looking for that shortcut to success, or the 3 easy steps to success model.

But have you noticed that God often works in slow, subtle ways? *[pause]*

Of course, He can and has worked in obvious, dramatic ways throughout history, that's for sure.

But in many instances, He actually works in slow, subtle ways. *[pauseeeee]*

God also often works in surprising and mysterious ways, too. *[pause]*

I like this one hymn by William Cowper which says...

“Deep in unfathomable mines of never failing skill; He treasures up his bright designs, and works His sovereign will.”¹ *[pause]*

Hasn't God worked in your life in surprising ways?

Something happened and you thought, “Nothing good can come out of this, just look at the situation.”

But then unexpectedly, God did something amazing through that dark time and you stood amazed at how God had worked in such an unexpected way. *[pauseeee]*

The parables that we will look at this morning show us the surprising nature of God's kingdom.

They show us this theme that God does truly work (in many cases) in slow, subtle, surprising ways. *[pauseeeee]*

Now in order to truly feel the impact of these parables on the original disciples, you must put yourself in their sandals. *[pause]*

They had so many promises of God that He would intervene and bring His glorious rule to earth.

There was heightened anticipation for the Messiah to come and make all things right, conquering evil and setting up God's eternal throne.

And now Jesus arrives on the scene and that triumphant kingdom didn't seem to arrive. *[pause]*

There was antagonism towards Jesus, the Messiah, so what's with that?

And He's being so gentle and lowly, and not so much triumphing over the political landscape, like they thought.

So their thinking about the kingdom had to be reshaped.

They had to come to realize that God's reign *had* come, but it would look different than they thought in this age. *[pause]*

¹ “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” by William Cowper, 1773.

Yes, there will be a day of the kingdom coming in all of its glorious display of power and justice, yet there is a time now that it would be present in this age, but be alongside much evil. *[pauseeee]*

The disciples' thoughts and questions are really the same kinds of things that we sometimes struggle with, too.

We think, "If Jesus is Lord, then why does evil seem to be winning at times?"

Or, "Why isn't evil and opposition being eradicated right now?"

Well Jesus will give us some parables to show us the surprising nature of the kingdom, and we would do well to listen.

So let's look at them, starting with the parable of the weeds and the parable of the net. [\(READ vss. 24-30, 36-43, 47-50\)](#)

The first thing that Jesus desires to communicate to us about the kingdom is this...

I. Don't be surprised by the presence of evil right now.

Once again, the parable in its most basic surface level is very easy to understand.

A man sows good seed in his field, but an enemy sows weeds amidst that good seed so that the good seed and the weeds are mixed together. *[pause]*

These weeds were most likely 'darnel' which looked very similar to wheat in its early stages.

And Rome actually had a law against planting weeds in someone else's field because doing so would be so potentially damaging. *[pause]*

So the master's servants ask what to do, but the master tells them to wait until the harvest and then to gather and divide up the plants, so as not to destroy it all.

Then at the end, the weeds are burned and the wheat is put into the barn. *[pauseeeee]*

The parable of the net is very similar to this one, but it uses fish instead.

A net is thrown into the sea, which gathers fish of every kind.

The men then separate the good and bad fish from one another. *[pauseeeee]*

OK, so what spiritual truths are being communicated to us through these parables? *[pause]*

Jesus explains that the sower is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed are the sons of the kingdom, the weeds are the sons of the evil one, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. *[pause]*

He goes on to state that the angels will do the work of dividing the righteous from the wicked.

The wicked are thrown into the fiery furnace, while the righteous shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

And then the parable of the net's explanation is pretty much the same. *[pauseeee]*

Now let's think through the truths that are revealed here. *[pause]*

First, we see that Satan is at work in this world. *[pause]*

Satan is called 'the god of this world'², and he strives his hardest to thwart God's work. *[pause]*

Some people act like Satan is not even real, or that He isn't doing anything, but that couldn't be farther from the truth.

Just because we can't see him with our eyes doesn't mean he is not at work in this world. *[pauseeee]*

Here we see that he's an enemy of God, who tries his best to ruin the good seed planted in the field of the world.

For his intent is to kill and destroy.³ *[pause]*

Satan seeks to mix together the wheat and weeds so much that they look identical, and therefore the field becomes ruined and ripped out. *[pause]*

Now since the good seed are believers and the weeds are unbelievers, what does that teach us?

One of Satan's top tactics is to try to blur the lines between the unbelieving world and the church. *[pause]*

Think about it...

If Satan can make it so that the world and the church are indistinguishable, then what good will the church be in this world?

How will the church shine as lights in this world, if we become so alike the world?

How could we be effective? How could we glorify God and shine the light on His majesty? *[pauseeee]*

This is why the perennial struggle the church has is the temptation to start to be conformed to this world.⁴ *[pause]*

In some cases, there is barely any difference between a certain church and the culture around it. *[pause]*

² See 2 Corinthians 4:4 among other passages.

³ A reference to John 10:10.

⁴ A reference to Romans 12:2.

The culture around us tries to conform us into its own image, and then we also feel the pressure to go with the flow of the world so that it doesn't hate us.

But we must keep going back to the basics...

We are the church, we are not a community club or just merely some local charitable organization.

We are not an outpost of the world, we are an outpost of the Kingdom of Heaven!

We do not exist to please the world around us, we exist because of and for the pleasure of God Almighty! *[pauseeee]*

Yes, we live in this world, but we are not to be *of* this world.

In fact, the world will hate us because we belong to Christ, and if it loves us, it's a big red flag indicating: problem!⁵ *[pauseeee]*

Let's not give into the temptation and pressures to conform to this world -- that's walking right into Satan's trap.

No, let's stay strange in this world, for we are strange to this world.

Let's keep looking like wheat and not weeds, for we truly are wheat. *[pauseeee]*

Satan is at work in this world, do you remember that?

There is a cosmic battle going on that Satan is trying to win, and so we must not be caught unawares.

Evil is real, Satan is active, and he is focused on destruction.

But guess what?

Though Satan tries his hardest, though there *is* a battle, the battle is *completely uneven*. *[pause]*

He's going up against the Lord God, whose purposes are never foiled or frustrated.

He does not lose! *[pause]*

Write that on the tablet of your mind, post it on your bathroom mirror, plaster it on your walls, doors, everywhere: **GOD DOES NOT LOSE!** *[pauseeee]*

Though Satan tries his hardest, his work and effort is in vain, for the Kingdom of God will prevail.

The weeds tactic won't be successful, and the wheat won't be destroyed. *[pause]*

⁵ A reference to John 15:19.

All of Satan's work is meant to destroy, yet in the end, it will be destroyed.

His work will go up in smoke, and Christ's wheat will be preserved. *[pauseee]*

What power and love of God!

We, the righteous because of Christ, are cared for and protected by Him.

He says, "Don't gather now, 'lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.'" *[pauseee]*

Sometimes it feels like God has abandoned us in the midst of an evil world.

We look around, and we see evil flourishing and triumphing.

That's because we are seeing the weeds thriving alongside of us, and we sometimes feel at a loss as to why Jesus doesn't just intervene.

But Jesus is showing us that He has not abandoned us, and will not abandon us.

He knows what's going on, and like the master of the house, he has a purpose in the waiting.

Like a wise farmer, He's doing what needs to be done to protect the wheat. *[pauseee]*

Struggling Christian, He has not forgotten you, but He cares about you like He does that wheat, where He wants it protected and not destroyed.

God has a Day of reckoning when He will once and for all deal with evil and save us.

He will show forth the truth, vindicate us, and we will shine like the sun in the kingdom.

So we must understand that evil won't be eradicated until the end. *[pauseee]*

There's a reason why evil is still present now, and not dealt with yet.

Because Jesus is showing us that right now is sowing time, not harvest time.

Someday will be harvest time, but right now it's not time. *[pause]*

Now is seed sowing time, and He has other seeds that He wants to plant, who are those who turn in faith to Him.

But amidst that seed sowing, there will be more weeds, so there will be a mixture of responses to Christ.

But there *will be* a Day when the angels will gather. *[pauseee]*

In light of this, my question for you is: how have you responded to Christ?

The parable of the wheat and weeds, and the parable of the net shows us that there are eternal consequences dependent on how you respond to Jesus. *[pause]*

For those who trust in Him, resting in His blood shed for them, they are preserved, saved, and will shine like the sun.

But for those who reject Christ, who don't repent of their sin and place their faith in Him, they will be thrown into the fiery furnace.

It is a place of eternal anguish, for there is weeping and gnashing of teeth there. *[pauseeee]*

This is serious, so do not take it lightly.

This is God's Word, this is truth, so we must accept it and realize that Hell is real and Hell is horrific. *[pause]*

Repent and turn in faith today, trusting in Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross, and rose from the dead.

He can and will save you to the uttermost.⁶ *[pauseeee]*

So we are not to be surprised by the presence of evil, but also, Jesus shows us by parables...

II. Don't be surprised by the Kingdom's small, seemingly unimpressive appearance.

Let's READ some more, starting in verse 31....[31-35, 44-46, 51-58]

I think we all know that not everything is as it first appears. *[pause]*

If you have ever painted a wall, you know that the fresh paint actually looks slightly different than what it will look like when it's dried.

Or when you plant a seed, you certainly know that in the end, it will not look like a seed anymore. *[pause]*

Looks can be deceiving at first.

So also, Jesus is teaching us that the kingdom is like that.

It looks small, seemingly insignificant and unimpressive, but it's not. *[pauseeee]*

This actually goes with what we just talked about.

For though there will be many negative responses by people, and evil will continue for a while, yet the kingdom will advance. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus gives two illustrations to speak of the kingdom's surprising nature.

⁶ A reference to Hebrews 7:25.

He says that it's like a mustard seed, which is tiny, yet when it grows, it turns into this tree that has birds in it.

And He gives a parable about how the kingdom is like leaven put into flour, which leavens it all.
[pause]

In both of these, the kingdom is seen as starting small and seemingly insignificant.

What's a small little mustard seed? What's a little leaven?

It's so small, yet with each one, it grows and grows into something amazing. [pauseeee]

This was an important lesson for the early disciples, for they thought that the kingdom would come with this overt power and bigness right away.

Yet Jesus is showing them that it actually starts small and turns into something big and glorious.
[pause]

In each case, the presence of the seed and leaven actually gives us confidence of what it will turn into.

So also, Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom in its present form gives us confidence that someday the kingdom will come in all of its glorious power and splendor. [pauseeeee]

Just think of what has happened throughout church history from those early days until now.
[pause]

What started out with Jesus and his small band of disciples has now spread to most of the world.

There are now over 2 billion Christians in the world. [pauseeee]

Think also of how it all started with this small group, but what do we see in Revelation?

Revelation 7:9 says, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..." [pause]

Now that's a seed that turns into a tree.

That's leaven that works its way throughout the whole flour. [pauseeee]

We put so much weight into appearances of success and into bigness right away, don't we?

But God is constantly prompting us to recall that He works in small, subtle ways that turn into glorious things. [pause]

God delights in small beginnings, so we dare not despise small things.⁷ *[pause]*

The beginning smallness of situations should call us to trust the bigness of our God.

He proves time and time again that He takes what's small and seemingly unimpressive and works wonders. *[pauseeee]*

What may the Lord be doing right now in the seemingly 'hidden' things?

Is there a seed planted that will turn into something amazing?

Is there leaven in the flour? *[pause]*

God is at work in the world.

Though we may not always notice it, God's kingdom is advancing.

The full outcome isn't seen now, but that doesn't mean it won't come.

So we remain faithful, knowing that our God reigns, He will do His work, and His eternal kingdom will someday be demonstrated in all of its glories when Christ returns. *[pauseeeee]*

This smallness and seemingly insignificance is demonstrated when Jesus goes to Nazareth at the end of the chapter. *[pause]*

Here is the Messiah, who has grown up in their own town, and yet the people of Nazareth overlook Him. *[pause]*

To them, His small, humble beginnings were just too small in their mind for Him to be anything special.

He didn't seem impressive growing up, so they stumbled over that fact.

But little did they realize that God often works in small, subtle, surprising ways -- and Jesus' early, humble beginnings were one of them. *[pauseeeee]*

This smallness and seemingly insignificance continues as Jesus gives us the parable of the hidden treasure and pearl. *[pause]*

In two very similar parables, one man stumbles upon treasure that he sells everything for, and the other man seeks pearls, finds one of great value, and sells everything for it. *[pause]*

This relates to the kingdom.

It looks small like that hidden treasure and one pearl.

⁷ See Zechariah 4:10.

Its true significance is hidden to many, who don't even realize that it's there, yet it is worth everything.

It has immense value! *[pausee]*

The fact that Christ is Lord, and in Him is peace, righteousness, and life is like that hidden treasure and pearl of great value. *[pause]*

To many, they just overlook it and move on with life.

To many, they don't consider it worth much.

But those with eyes of faith understand that following Christ is worth everything they have. *[pauseeee]*

There's a true story of one of Apple Computer's co-founders.

He sold his share in the company in 1976 for \$800, and today if he kept it, it would be worth \$35 billion. *[pause]*

Like that share in the company, the Gospel does not look appealing or like a treasure to a lot of people, but what they do not realize is that it has immeasurable worth.

And those who find out its worth are willing to give up everything for it. *[pauseeee]*

Do we even fully comprehend the value of the Kingdom? *[pause]*

So many times we push serving Christ to the periphery of our lives, while we focus on other things.

But the truth is that once we realize the treasure of Christ, our response should only be a radical surrender of our whole lives and earthly ambitions. *[pauseeee]*

What does your life revolve around?

Around gaining money, success, status, and things OR does your life revolve around God's purposes and Kingdom? *[pauseeee]*

What we own and (in many cases) cherish now are trivial and unsatisfying compared to surrendering and submitting to Jesus Christ our Lord.

For we, who recognize the value of following Christ, have come to understand that knowing Christ is better than life and strength and family and friends all combined together. *[pauseeee]*

Have you recognized the value of the Kingdom? *[pause]*

It is so good that we should share it with others!

Jesus says in verse 52, “every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” *[pause]*

Now that we know these truths, we should share them with others.

We are proclaimers of truth treasures. *[pause]*

Yes, some will reject the gospel, but we still bring out the treasure of the Gospel so that more and more people can know how amazing it is. *[pauseee]*

Do you even see the good news of Jesus, what it means to follow Him, and be in His kingdom as a treasure to be shared?

Who will you share it with this week? *[pauseee]*

Evil is present around us in this age, and the kingdom of God sometimes seems small and unimpressive at times, but Jesus shows us that...

With eyes of faith, we look to the greatness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

How great is our God?

How great is our Lord and Savior and King?

How great is His kingdom? *[pause]*

Though we sinned against God, yet He redeems us through Christ’s blood, and not only that, but He promises us a part in His glorious Kingdom?

He turns rebels into sons of His kingdom?! *[pause]*

Stand amazed!

Let your jaw drop to the news of such matchless grace shown to you. *[pauseee]*

Like the wheat, He loves us and protects us until the end, when we get to shine in the kingdom of the Father.

Because of His teaching, we now possess treasures of truth that we are to share with others.

And if you truly know Christ and know Him as Lord, then you have found a treasure and a pearl of great price that is worth everything for. *[pause]*

So let’s live our lives seeking first His kingdom,⁸ living for His renown, and proclaiming to others the treasure that we have found in Him.

⁸ A reference to Matthew 6:33.