

Kelham Baptist Church

Men's Bible Study

January 29, 2023

THE PARABLES OF MATTHEW 13 AND THE CHURCH AGE

Lesson 3

READ MATTHEW 13:31 - 32. Following the pattern Jesus set, the man who sows the mustard seed is Christ. The field is the world. The construction of this parable implies that the mustard seed is an herb (a small garden plant). The expectation is that this seed will produce a small garden size plant. However, this plant has unnatural growth and develops into a tree instead of an herb. The plant gives shelter to the birds of the air. In the parable of the Sower, the birds are demons that come to take away the seed that was sown. Many times in the bible, the birds of the air represent birds of prey and usually picture the work of the devil.

In this parable, Jesus is picturing what happens in Christendom while He is absent: The organized church grows very large and becomes a place of shelter and nourishment for demons.

Not all theologians agree with the above interpretation. In fact, most consider this parable as showing how Christendom grows into a large organization that is a good influence in the world. In order to justify their view, they claim that during the first century in Palestine, the mustard plant was a tree. Careful reading of the parable shows that Jesus considered the mustard plant as an herb because He says it grows greater than the herbs. If the mustard plant were a tree, there would be no need for Him to say it grows greater than the herbs.

The parable of the mustard plant pictures Christendom becoming very large and infiltrated by unbelievers. It pictures the church at Pergamos, the compromising church that is "married" to worldly things. The word Pergamos means "thoroughly married". Pergamos was the main city for Roman emperor worship and contained pagan temples and altars to false gods. Jesus said Satan's throne is at Pergamos. When the Persians conquered Babylon, Satan moved his throne to Pergamos through Attalus III, a priest-king of the Chaldeans. With all the evil influence, Pergamos was a city where it really was "tough" to be a Christian and Jesus understood this.

READ REVELATION 2:12 - 17. After addressing this letter to the messenger, Christ identifies Himself as having a sharp two-edged

sword. This sword is the Word of God that cuts asunder. The devil is always defeated when up against the Word of God. Jesus says He recognizes their good works even though they live where Satan has his throne. Christ commends those who did not renounce Him when many of their members were martyred. Antipas was only one of many. Christ acknowledges that Pergamos is a hard place to remain true to Christian ideals. They were under pressure, but they kept their testimony alive and won many to Christ. However, Christ had two things against this church: The doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. The doctrine of Balaam sanctioned immoral practices and mixed marriages. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans established a ruling class of clergy. The church at Ephesus hated the Nicolaitans; the church Pergamos tolerated them. Satan comes into the church at Pergamos and becomes a part of it.

Christ calls for repentance or He will come quickly to judge with the Word of God. To those who overcome, He will feed them with "hidden manna". Christ is hidden from the world today, but Christians are to feed on Him. Those who feed on Him will be given a "white stone" that will have a personal meaning to each believer.

Constantine became the Roman emperor about A.D. 306 and wanted to conquer the whole world. In 312, he saw a "cross" in the sky and took this as a sign that he would achieve his goal of ruling the world if he would become a Christian. He professed

to being a Christian and ordered all his armies to be baptized. This resulted in a large influx of unbelievers being baptized into the church. Thus fulfilling the parable of the small herb that grew to be a great tree that nurtures and shelters unbelievers. Some historians teach that Constantine did a great work for God and a big victory for Christianity. Nothing could be further from the truth; he brought the world into the church.

The parable of the Mustard seed pictures the church of Pergamum during the epoch of approximately A.D. 313—A.D. 600. The church of the third parable is married to the world and permitted immoral practices, mixed marriages, and they tolerated establishing a ruling class of clergy.

Next week we will study the fourth parable that is of the leaven and pictures the church at Thyatira.

