

We have an Enemy
From the Series, “Secrets of the Kingdom”
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Introduction

In the last article, we started a new series, which we called “Secrets of the Kingdom.” We started by asking: Do you want to hear a secret? Then we explained the rationale for the series.

This week, we’re going to start with another question: Do you want to hear another secret?

We like being let in on a secret. The only thing better than one secret, is two. So, this week we’ll continue our series and learn another secret of the Kingdom.



To get the most out of this message, let’s think for a bit. What would you do if someone said they were going to tell you a secret, and it turns out that you know about it already? If I said, “Let me tell you a secret: Chocolate cake is great.” You would respond, “Well, yeah, everyone knows that. That’s no secret!”

That’s understandable. So, let’s move on to something a little more complex. How about if I say, “Smoking is bad for you.” Most people will reply that this, too, is something that most people know. Here’s the problem: If everyone knows smoking is bad for you, why do people still do it? In fact, so many people smoke that the companies who make cigarettes make millions of dollars. How about this: Does knowing that smoking is bad for you make it any easier for people to quit smoking? A comedian once said, “Quitting smoking is easy – I’ve done it a thousand times!”

Now, There was a time when most people didn’t know that smoking was bad for you. We have pictures of people smoking dating back centuries - from all cultures. Until the last century, it was thought to be a benign pastime. Some even thought it was good for you. Imagine that you lived in those days. You’re sitting around with a friend smoking, and someone tries to tell you how bad smoking is. Would you believe them? Back then, the idea that smoking was bad for you was a kind of a secret. Some people knew it, but most didn’t.

Today, sometimes people know the secret, but they still haven’t thought it through completely. Maybe part of thinking it through is to enter the minds of people in the days that they didn’t know about it. Maybe then we can see where the problem came from.

That brings us to today's topic. Today, Jesus is going to share another secret of the Kingdom. At the time that he shared it, people didn't know. In modern times, many people who have spent time in churches know about the secret. However, it seems that many of those people haven't thought through it completely. So, today, let's discuss the second secret of the Kingdom. Here it is:

We have an enemy.

Let's see what Jesus has to tell us.

24 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27 "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 28 "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 29 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" (Matthew 13:24-30)

In our last session, we mentioned that a parable is a story that helps listeners to understand higher truths. The teller of the parable tries to find simple things that everyone is familiar with - From there you can build to more complex ideas. Most people in ancient Israel were familiar with farming. That's why Jesus used it a lot. We saw that in the first parable of the Seeds and the Soils.

This is where we need to go back to their society. They had some things that we don't have today. One of those things relates to what people did when they were angry. Every society has people who don't get along, but societies can be very different in how they handle conflicts.

Since most people were farmers in those days, if you were angry with someone, you could hurt them by damaging their crops. One way to do that was by using the seeds of the Darnel plant. Darnel is a member of the rye family, so it looks a lot like wheat - Especially when it's first planted. Unlike wheat though, darnel has one very troubling property: Its seed are poisonous. So, if you wanted to hurt someone, you could throw some Darnel seed into their wheat field when they weren't looking.

This was so common, the Romans had to create a law that punished people for doing it. Imagine that! So, Jesus is using a picture here that would be familiar to all his listeners, but not to most people today.

The good news is, at some point, as it grows, Darnel looks different than wheat, so an experienced farmer can spot it and pull it out. However, if the farmer was not experienced, or if he was too busy to check, the results could be devastating.

Now, think about this: What kind of a person would do this (Spread Darnel in a field)? If the owner missed it, people could eat the grain and get very sick. This would include innocent people, like children. The farmer would potentially be devastated financially. He wouldn't be able to feed his family - And in this case, his servants. In those days, many servants were highly dependent on their employers. You didn't just move to another job when they had a problem. And here's a bigger problem: People in the local area bought the grain. They depended on it to eat. You could cause a famine.

So, what kind of person would spread Darnel in a field?

- An evil person, blinded by hatred, who didn't care who they hurt.
- A cowardly person, who didn't have the courage to face people they disagreed with.
- An underhanded Person, someone who crept in during the night when people were sleeping.

Keep all that in mind.

In this story, the farmer and his workers are experienced enough to see the problem. The workers though, are less experienced. They want to go out and literally root out the problem. They want to pull all the bad plants. But fortunately, the farmer knows better. When wheat and Darnell are young, they look a lot alike. Inexperienced workers could pull out the wheat along with the Darnel. Also, the plants grow so close together that their roots are now intertwined. Pulling out the bad plants will damage a lot of the good ones.

The solution? The experienced farmer says, wait until the harvest. When the plants are grown, although it will be a lot of work, it will be easier to separate the problem plants and keep the good. Then, you can have a roaring bonfire with the weeds.

If you read our last article, you will recall that Jesus told a parable. Then, later he took his close followers aside to explain it. He will do the same with this one, so hang on for a bit and Jesus will give us the meaning.

For now, Jesus moves on to two more parables. First, he shares a story of a local plant:

31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

(Matthew 13:31-32)

This is an interesting little parable. It's short - Only two sentences long. In those two sentences are four parts: A seed (mustard) which grows into a large plant, a man who planted the seed, the field where he planted, and birds.

We can understand that people listening to Jesus would understand a man planting something in his field. They would understand birds. But this mustard seed; would it be familiar? Today, the closest we come to mustard is putting a little on our hot dog. Older readers may recall a mustard called "Grey Poupon". In the 1980's the people who made this mustard were trying to sell it as a sophisticated spread to be put on fine meats and cheese. In one commercial, a Rolls Royce is stopped at a traffic light. Another Rolls Royce pulls up next to it and the passenger rolls down his window. He asks, "Pardon me, but do you have any Grey Poupon?" A voice from the other Rolls answers, "But of course!"

Well, I don't think anyone in Jesus' time knew anything about Grey Poupon, or hot dogs for that matter. Here's what they did know: The following was written by a Roman historian named Pliny the Elder:

"Mustard... is extremely beneficial for the health. It grows entirely wild, though it is improved by being transplanted: but on the other hand when it has once been sown it is scarcely possible to get the place free of it, as the seed when it falls germinates at once."

(Pliny the Elder, in his Natural History (published around AD 78))

So, Mustard was well known and was considered a beneficial plant. You could see why somebody would want it in his field. However, you had to be careful with it - It started as a tiny seed, but once it got started, it grew like crazy.

Now, here's something interesting. When Jesus told the parable of the Seeds and the Soil, he left the crowd to figure it out. But he later gave an explanation to his closest followers. He's going to do that with the parable of the weeds. However, he's not going to do it with this one. We're left on our own. Why? More on that in a few minutes.

For now, Jesus is going to tell another parable.

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:33)

This is even shorter than the last one - One sentence. We have three parts: Yeast. A woman. And some dough - A lot of dough Sixty pounds. This lady is baking for a crowd!

Whereas most people in the days of Jesus understood farming, everyone understood baking. If you were to ask the average person in the crowd what they thought of yeast, you would get different answers. Some people liked yeast a lot.

Another word for this material is “leaven”. Today, we would call this “sour”. If you bake, or if you have a bread machine, you get commercial yeast in packets. Sour yeast is very different. You make sour yeast by leaving moist flour out until it began to get fermented. Once it’s done, you use a little bit every day. Then, you have to nurse your batch of sour yeast along, so it doesn’t die. Today we would use this to make sourdough bread.

If you make sour yeast from scratch, it’s time consuming, and it’s tricky. However, a quick way to get this is to borrow a small bit from someone else. Then you use this as a starter. Once you had your yeast, you put just a little bit into your bread dough overnight. It didn’t take long for that tiny bit of yeast to work its way through the whole lump of dough. Then, the dough would rise. It would become two or three times its original size.

Yeast was so useful, a new bride would often receive a gift of a tiny bit of yeast for her wedding. She would use that to bake bread for her husband and then her family for the rest of her life.

On the other hand, yeast was specifically forbidden during certain events. When the people of Israel were freed from Egypt, Moses instructed them to bake bread without yeast.

So, sometimes people baked with yeast. Sometimes, they didn’t. Which is Jesus referring to here? At first glance, we don’t know. He didn’t explain this parable, either. Are we left in the dark? I don’t think so. We’ll learn more in a bit.

Before we begin to understand these parables, Matthew makes a comment on all this.

34 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

(Matthew 13:34-35)

If this sounds familiar, it’s because Jesus said something similar in our last session. At that time, he quoted the prophet Isaiah. For those taking notes, this is a quote is taken from Psalm 78:1-4.

This concept was so important to Matthew that he repeated the idea within a few sentences of the last story. By doing this, Matthew is reminding us of two things. First, we are being let in on secrets. These are “things hidden since the creation of the world.” In this, we are reminded of the great privilege that we have in hearing the things we’re hearing. Many don’t hear these things. Many who hear don’t understand. Since God brought you here to listen, and since he gave you the gift of understanding, know that you are receiving a wonderful gift.

The second thing Matthew wants to remind us about is that this has all been predicted. The great prophets knew very well that many people would not listen to the Messiah. And so, he would speak to those people in parables. Again and again, all throughout his book, Matthew

reminds us of the power of God expressed through Messianic prophecy. God is eternal. God is all-knowing. God is all-seeing. God is all-powerful. That's why he can predict something centuries before it happens, and then make sure it will come to pass.

Let's read on. Once again, Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, but his closest followers got an explanation. Let's read about it.

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. (Matthew 13:36-39)

Jesus starts by identifying the players in the story. He is the Sower, the one who sends out the seed. The seed is the people of the kingdom - That's the church. One of the church's main jobs is to go into all the world and preach the gospel of Jesus.

However, then Jesus warns his followers: it's not going to be easy. They will have opposition. The weeds, the poisonous plant, are the people of the evil one who Jesus identifies as the Devil or Satan. Earlier, we asked the question: What kind of a person would damage a crop with poisonous weeds? The answer was, an evil person driven by raw hatred. A cowardly person. An underhanded person. Well, that all fits the evil one. And it fits many of his followers. Fortunately, we won't be alone. We will have the angels of God helping us.

So, if we are the good seed, then we are going to go out into the world. But, we will meet opposition - Serious opposition. Sometimes deadly opposition. Why? Here's the secret: ***Because we have an enemy.***

We know that today because we're watching all this from a vantage point of centuries. However, in those days, people didn't fully understand it. They may have known about the Devil, but they didn't fully think through what his presence meant. Jesus had to warn them. Those who failed to take warning were in danger. What kind of danger? Jesus goes on.

40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (Matthew 13:40-41)

So again, we are not alone. The angels will be there to help. And at the end of the age, they will deal with the evil one and his helpers. There will be a judgment. All who do evil will be identified. There will be no place to hide. And here's what the story warns: There will be no way to blend in. Those who reject Jesus will stand out. Jesus talks about the weeds being burned in the fire.

What kind of fire will it be? A little one?

42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear. (Matthew 13:42-43)

Is it a little fire? No! It's a blazing furnace. It will be like the hottest volcano. Some people suggest that when Jesus talks about hell, that the flames are symbolic. Does it sound to you like he's being symbolic? It sounds to me like hell is a terrible place. You don't want to go there. You don't want your loved ones to go there. On our best days, we don't want our worst enemies to go there. Jesus talks about a judgement where everyone who rejects him will suffer unimaginable torment forever. But on the other hand, there are those who follow Jesus. They will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom.

Again, if you've spent time in church, you've heard a lot of this. For those who haven't, this is the time to decide to follow Jesus. Talk to us. We want you to shine like the sun in heaven. We don't want the alternative for you. There will be important contact information at the end of this article

So, those who follow Jesus are sent out into the world. They will meet opposition from an enemy. But is it just in the world? That's where the other two parables come in. Remember, Jesus did not explain them. Why not? Let me suggest: Jesus doesn't just want us to do things. Jesus wants us to become like him. If we're becoming like him, we'll think like him. Then, we'll do the things he does. For this to happen, people need to do two things. First, they need to spend time with Jesus. Next, they need to turn on their brains. That's why Jesus doesn't explain everything. It's up to us to do some work.

How about that parable about the mustard seed? We have a mustard seed. It's tiny, but it gets big. Now, who is Jesus talking to? The rich and powerful have no time for Jesus. The poor and meek, the lowly, the small, do. The core team of Jesus had fishermen and other common men. None of them were scholars. None of them were soldiers. None of them were wealthy. None of them were rulers. And they faced fierce opposition from the devil himself. It might be very easy to be discouraged. But what happened? Two thousand years later, the world is populated with over 7 billion people. Do you know how many of them name the name of Jesus? Over a billion. That's right – if you take all the people who claim to have some form of Christianity as their religion, the number is over one billion.

But, are all those people truly Christians? Not all of them act like it. That's where the birds come in. What kind of birds are these? Some birds are beautiful. If you own a pet store, you're thinking of pretty canaries and clever parrots. However, some birds target your windshield when you're driving down the highway. If you're a car owner, you're thinking of those kinds of birds.

So, which is it? Are we left on our own? No. Remember, the secrets of the kingdom are only understood by dedicated followers of Jesus. If you hang around with Jesus, you know how he thinks. The better you know him, the better you know who to understand what he says. You know the kinds of things he talks about.

So, let's go back just a few sentences in the story that Matthew is telling. We covered this in our last article. When Jesus told the parable of the Seeds and the Soils, he mentioned birds. Recall that birds ate the seeds that the Sower was trying to plant. Let's read the explanation that Jesus gave about this:

19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. (Matthew 13:19)

So, when Jesus used birds as a symbol only a few moments earlier, they were symbols of the Evil One, the Devil. When he told the parable of the weeds only a few moments earlier, his purpose was to warn his followers that the Devil was the one sending his minions to fight the people of God. So, based on the context, the birds who perch in the branches of the mustard plant are symbols of Evil One. Jesus is saying that he will find ways to infiltrate the church.

How about the yeast and the dough? A woman is baking bread, and the yeast works its way through the whole lump. Is this the yeast that a bride receives on her wedding day? Or is it the yeast that people are supposed to leave out of their bread at Passover? Again, the answer can be found by those who hang around with Jesus. Here's how Jesus spoke about yeast in another place:

5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. 6 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:5-6)

If you look at the way Jesus spoke about yeast, it is exclusively as a symbol of evil. In this case, the evil of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which we've discussed on numerous occasions.

What's the point of all this? Jesus is telling his closest followers: The church starts in a very humble way with people the world considers to be nobodies. However, it will grow. It will become influential and powerful. It will do so despite fierce opposition from the Evil one. The fight will be both outside the church and inside.

What does this mean for us? Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Once again, Jesus shares the secrets of the kingdom with his closest followers. Today we've learned: We have an enemy.

If you've spent time in churches, you know that. But perhaps you haven't fully thought through what it means. Because God is powerful, his church will grow. It will grow in spite of fierce opposition from outside and in. If you don't know that, you could get discouraged. You might be hurt when you run into evil. You might be confused when you run into error. You might spend all your time stymied by questions like, "Why does God allow evil in the world?" We can spend all kinds of time thinking about that, but in the end, we only need to know that God has a plan. His plan involves allowing evil in the world until the end of the age. We are called to face it, with his help. He is the God of all time, so he is in no hurry.

But here is where we receive great encouragement: Jesus will win in the end. There will be a terrifying final judgment. The evil, those who reject Jesus, will be punished. The righteous, those who follow Jesus will be rewarded - They will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of heaven.

The final thing we take away is this: No one could have known back in the days of Jesus that his church would be so successful. To them, it was a secret. Jesus let them in on it. He predicted the explosive growth of his church when no one could have foreseen it. Now, 2,000 years later, we know he was right. This shows us that the words of Jesus are always true. People could rely on them when Jesus walked the earth. We can rely on them today. So, learn God's word recorded in the Bible. And when you've learned God's word, trust it.

Today, we've been let in on another secret. Watch for our next article as we learn more secrets of the Kingdom.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ

TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site:

PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net
