

Sowing

Across the Street Around the World Series, November 11 & 12, 2023 | Matthew 13:31-33
Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal

What is the Kingdom of God like?

First, we should probably define the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is the place where God is in charge, where God's rule is recognized, and where God's rule is actualized.

God's rule being recognized means that God is acknowledged as King or Lord.

God's rule being actualized means that God is in charge and his will is implemented.

The Bible says that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That means a day is coming when God's rule will be recognized.

The Bible also says that one day, God will wipe away sin, death, evil, and everything and everyone who belongs to sin, death, and evil. Everyone will obey him perfectly. There will be no more death, suffering, mourning, crying, or pain. God's rule will be actualized.

That day is in the future. It hasn't come yet.

At the same time, the Kingdom of God is starting inside of us. We who are disciples of Jesus know that he is King, we proclaim that he is Lord of our lives, and we seek to obey him. So, there are little slices of the Kingdom of God here and there in us.

The Kingdom of God is the subject of a string of parables by Jesus in Matthew chapter 13.

A parable is a story or a word picture that illustrates or teaches a truth.

Jesus tells multiple parables in quick succession in Matthew chapter 13.

Each one seeks to illustrate or teach about the Kingdom of God.

So, what is the Kingdom of God like?

That's the question Jesus is addressing in Matthew 13.

That's the question Jesus is addressing in the Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven.

That's what we really want to know and understand today.

But why was Jesus answering this question? That's important to know as well.

People around Jesus did not understand the Kingdom of God.

Let's open our Bibles and get to the root of the setting for what Jesus says in Matthew 13.

Why does Jesus tell this series of parables about the Kingdom of God in Matthew 13?

Matthew 13:1 has a clue. It begins with the phrase, "That same day ..."

What day? What happened on that day?

"That same day" began at the beginning of Matthew chapter 12.

In Matthew 12:1-8, Jesus and his disciples were walking toward an unnamed town.

Matthew 12:1 begins:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

The disciples were walking through a field of grain. They were hungry, so they plucked a few heads of grain to eat. None of that is a problem. It's quite natural.

However, it was a Sabbath day, a day of rest and worship. In the Law, it was forbidden to do work on the Sabbath. The Jewish religious leaders considered plucking grain to eat as work.

So, they challenged Jesus. How could he allow his disciples do such a thing?

Then in Matthew 12:9-14, Jesus went into town and into the synagogue.

The religious leaders were primed with a dilemma.

There was a man with a withered hand in the synagogue.

Look at **Matthew 12:10**:

And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him.

Of course, Jesus did heal. And the religious leaders were furious. How could he do such a thing?

In Matthew 12:15-32, Jesus left the synagogue.

He continued healing people. Someone brought a demon-oppressed man. The man was blind and mute because of the demon. Jesus healed the man and freed him from the demon.

People in the crowd wondered aloud if Jesus might not be the Messiah, the Son of David.

But the religious leaders, the Pharisees, had another theory. In **Matthew 12:24** we read:

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."

They accused Jesus of casting out demon by demonic power.

How else could he do such things?

Finally, in Matthew 12:46-50, we discover that even Jesus' own family had questions.

Jesus was in a house by this point. He was teaching.

He received word that his family was outside, his mother and his brothers.

Jesus said something shocking. "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?"

That sounds disrespectful. However, there are indications that life with his family was not always smooth for Jesus. In **Mark 3:21** we read:

And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

His own family at times asked, "How could you be like this and do all of this?"

Everyone had questions for Jesus. He was surrounded by doubts and misunderstanding.

He left the house where he was and went to the shore nearby.

He got into a boat, and a crowd gathered on the shore. Jesus sat down in the boat, which meant that he was ready to teach with authority.

It was time for people to understand the Kingdom of God. What is it really?

People did not understand, and Jesus meant to correct their misunderstanding.

God is the Sower who initiates the Kingdom of God.

Let's read again the Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven in Matthew 13:31-33:

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 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."

Notice that the key events happened in the past.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, a man took a mustard seed and sowed it in his field. However, that action happened in the past. Before the parable began.

The same is true in the Parable of the Leaven. A woman took yeast hid it in a massive quantity of flower. Again, the action happened at some point in the past. It has already been done.

This points us to a critically important truth.

God had already put the Kingdom of God in the world.

The Kingdom of God is not just coming in the future.

The Kingdom of God is not starting now.

The Kingdom of God has already begun.

God has put the Kingdom of God in the world like a man who put a mustard seed in the ground or like a woman who put yeast in a big lump of dough.

We don't see the beginning of the Kingdom of God. We see it unfolding.

We don't start the Kingdom of God ourselves.

It is given by God. It is started by God. That is very good news!

Sometimes it's better to leave a project to the professionals.

Not always. I'm happy to try some things. But still, it's not good for me to do some things.

I think back to trying to build a couch when I was in college.

My roommate and I wanted a couch in our room for our junior year.

However, we were both broke. We couldn't afford to buy a brand-new couch.

Rather than buying a used one, which would have made great sense, I came up with the idea of making a couch. I thought, "It can't be that hard!"

So, I bought some wood for the frame. I thought, "Wood can't be that expensive." Yes, it can.

Then I thought, "Let's buy some cushions and cover them. That can't be that expensive." Did you know that cushions and upholstery fabric are expensive? I didn't.

Then there was the subject of making it comfortable. That was expensive and complicated.

Then I got busy, and my roommate and his father ended up building the frame.

And I didn't know how to sew, so his mother ended up sewing the covers for the cushions.

In the end, we spent loads of money, I did very little of the work, and the sofa was incredibly heavy. Sometimes, it's best to leave the work to a professional.

The Kingdom of God is definitely best left to THE Professional.

God is the professional! He started and designed his Kingdom. God is the professional.

And that is very good news.

Because the Kingdom of God is already started in this world, it is sustained by his power and does not depend on us. We can't stop it, ruin it, mess it up, or destroy it.

It is God's Kingdom, not ours. GOOD NEWS!

God is the Sower who initiates the Kingdom of God.

Like God, we are sowers.

God is the Sower.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, God is the one who sowed seed into the ground.

In the Parable of the Leaven, God is the one who put the yeast into the dough.

God is the one taking the initiative. That points out something important about who God is.

God is the Great Initiator.

God is the one who made the decision in eternity to save us. **Ephesians 1:3-4** reads:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. ...

Before creating us, God knew that he would have to save us, that Jesus would die on the cross.

God, the Great Initiator, made us anyway.

And when we sinned, God put in place the plan to save us.

All along, God has been the Great Initiator.

God is the Generous One.

God is the one who created the world, a place for us to exist and to be with him.

God is the one who created us and gave us the breath of life.

God is the one who still causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the just and unjust.

God is the one who fills the world even now with good things for us to enjoy.

God not only creates us in the first place but sustains us every day.

God is the one who gave us Jesus Christ. God the Son is the one who died to pay the price for our sin.

God the Holy Spirit is the one who is with us now, calling us to God and reshaping us.

God is the King who will one day make the fallen world as it is into the world as it should be.
God is the Generous One.

We are created in God's image.

We are not like God in every way, but we are like God in some ways.
We don't do everything God does, but we do some of the things God does.

Like God, we are sowers.

In Genesis chapter one, as God created human beings, he blessed us and gave us a charge. **Genesis 1:28** reads:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

He commanded us to be fruitful, to multiply, and to have dominion over all the earth.

We studied the patriarch Abraham earlier this year, and he is a kind of template. He helps us to see what God wants for and from us. In **Genesis 12:2-3** God promises to make Abraham a great nation:

"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God doesn't promise to make each of us into great nations. This is a very specific promise to Abraham. But there is a pattern. We've discussed this before. We are blessed not to accrue blessings but so that we will be a blessing.

In **2 Corinthians 9:11** Paul writes:

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Like God, we are sowers. We have blessings, and we sow them. God wants us to be sowers.

Being sowers means we practice generosity.

Disciples of Jesus practice generosity by funding ministry together.

When the Church started in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, the Holy Spirit was powerfully present.

The presence of God the Holy Spirit changed them. They did life together, and provided for one another, and took care of the people around them.

When they saw need, they took care of that need. It was expensive, and many of the people were already very poor. But they were deeply generous!

In **Acts 4:34-35** we read:

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

That's what the church in Jerusalem did two thousand years ago, and that's the kind of thing we are still supposed to do. Jesus' disciples practice generosity by funding ministry together.

Disciples of Jesus practice generosity by funding the Church's mission together.

This was the case during Jesus' earthly ministry.

Remember, Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the one through whom the world was created. He has all the resources he would ever need.

Still, Jesus' mission was funded by people. In **Luke 8:3** we read:

... and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

That is true now. As we make disciples around the world, God could fund that mission any way he chose. However, he chooses to fund that mission through us.

Disciples of Jesus practice generosity by funding the Church's mission together.

Disciples of Jesus practice generosity in many ways.

It's not only money. Generosity is a way of life for us. We ARE sowers!

Jesus told us to sow loving actions in **John 13:34-35**:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We are known by sowing those loving actions.

Jesus told us to sow good deeds in **Matthew 5:14-16**:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

We sow good deeds and shine the light of Christ in the world.

Like our Father, we are sowers!

God is the Great Sower. He is the Great Initiator and the Generous One.

We, who are created in his image, are supposed to resemble our Father in this way.

Like our Father, we are sowers!

Will you take a next step in generosity?

If you are getting started in generosity, perhaps God is calling you to give something to make ministry and mission happen. Perhaps God is calling you to give something that just makes him look good and gets you started.

If you are learning generosity, perhaps God is calling you to give something regularly. Make it a weekly or monthly habit.

If you are growing in generosity, perhaps God is calling you to give with a plan, perhaps a portion of your income to help mission and ministry move forward.

If you really get what God is saying to us, it may be time to give something truly sacrificial.

What is your next step in generosity?