

# Matthew 13:33-35

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[ 0 : 00 ] For those of you who are fairly new to Sundays, we've been going through Matthew's Gospel. A few weeks ago we got to Matthew 12, and Matthew 12 in particular is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus.

! He's come, he's done all the signs, all the wonders, fulfilled all the prophecies, he's taken them through to this point where he does what the Pharisees always taught was a messianic miracle, something that only Messiah would do in the healing, the deliverance of a man from a dumb spirit. And I won't rehearse that again, but that was a particular ministry that the Pharisees had said, if someone turns up and does this, you're looking at Messiah. And as soon as he did it, they denied that he was Messiah, and they attributed his works to Beelzebul, the prince of demons.

And he told them at that time that what they had done was unforgivable, or would not be forgiven. And so from that point onwards, he said he would teach in parables.

And they questioned why he was teaching in parables, but from that moment on, he always taught the Jews in parables. He also offered them no more signs, said you're not going to see any more signs apart from the sign of Jonah, which is the sign of resurrection.

[ 1 : 33 ] But all the signs and wonders that he'd done to confirm his Messiahship, he was no longer doing for them, he was doing for the disciples. So this is the point that we had reached.

And if you remember, we tried to put ourselves in the shoes of the people listening to the parable of the sower, and explored how confused and nonplussed they must have been, because Jesus uttered that parable and then walked off, or they walked off.

But there was this kind of, what does that mean? And the true disciples went back to Jesus and asked him for an explanation. And he gave an explanation. And he did a similar thing with the parable of the wheat and the tares.

He said something about planting mustard seeds in the field of wheat. What's that all about? It doesn't even go along with the law, the law of diverse kinds.

You're not supposed to mix your crops. And so they walked away scratching their head, but some went back to Jesus and said, please, can you tell us about this parable? And then we've been left, if you recall, with the fact that Jesus said other parables, and according to Matthew's gospel, or any of the gospels, gave no explanation of those parables.

[ 2 : 57 ] And we're trying to deal with those now. And of course, this is fraught with interesting problems, because Jesus didn't give an explanation, and therefore people make it up.

Now, I'm hoping that I haven't made it up. But with these things, I'm always open to somebody to tell me you got that wrong, or you missed at least part of the point, or whatever.

So do come to me with your Bibles if you think I haven't interpreted it well. And last time, we dealt with the first of those, which was the parable of the mustard seed.

And we concluded at the end of that, that the law of diverse kinds means that you wouldn't plant a mustard seed in with other crops.

So what was the mustard seed doing there? And we deduced, and I won't go into any detail, because we did that last week, and you can get the talk if you need it. But we deduced that this represented, this mustard tree represented the church, and that the birds that were resting in the unclean birds, because birds were normally considered to be unclean, Gentiles were also considered to be unclean, and that these birds were probably a metaphor for the Gentile church that would fulfil the period of time that was coming.

[ 4 : 25 ] If you remember, these parables prepare God's people for the coming of the church age. The Jews, for the moment, are done with.

They've done the unforgivable. So the Jews are kind of sidelined. I'm not someone who is a replacement theologian. God has yet business to do with Israel.

And there will be a seven-year period of history to come, the Great Tribulation, that is entirely devoted to bringing Israel to salvation. But this is the sort of portal into the church age, which actually began at Pentecost.

But it's the run-up to that, where Jesus talks about what the kingdom of God is like. And this series of parables is called the parables of the kingdom, because they all express in some way what the kingdom of God is like.

So the kingdom of God was like this mustard tree that was planted in a place where it should never have been planted. And if the Jews had behaved themselves, it would never have been planted.

[ 5 : 32 ] But they didn't. And so the mustard tree, the church of the Gentiles, was necessary to give us the church age. As I say, get the talk if you want it.

Sorry? Thank you, Lord. Amen. Yeah. Absolutely. And now we've got this parable, the parable of the leaven. So let's read it.

It's Matthew 13. And verse 33. I always have a little bit of a giggle when I do these sermons that are only on two or three verses, because Joe and I both like to make progress through the scriptures. But you can't overlook these parables. There's such depth in just a few verses. And they reveal something of the heart of God that will at times reduce you to tears.

So verse 33. He spoke another parable to them. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.

[ 6 : 46 ] All these things Jesus spoke to the crowd in parables. And he did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet.

I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world. Now, I don't know this morning whether we will get to do verse 35.

I have prepared it. But it depends how well I get through the rest. Because we don't want to leave the children thinking they've been abandoned. This parable of the leaven, I don't know if any of you have heard it taught before.

I've never heard it taught the way I'm just about to approach it, which makes me feel very insecure. Because when you're either the only one or one of just a few that are saying things a certain way, you tend to think, have I got this really wrong?

And I'm not arrogant enough to think I'm always right. However, the way I've commonly heard it taught doesn't add up for me. And you may or may not agree.

[ 7 : 57 ] But because Jesus didn't give an explanation, or at least Matthew didn't recall it if he did, there's a certain amount that we are, how shall I say, we're vulnerable to getting it wrong.

There isn't a clear explanation from the Lord. However, I do think there's a clear explanation from the Old Testament as to what was meant here. And we have to remember that this parable was spoken to Jews.

It's written by a Jewish man to a Jewish audience. And at the time it was spoken by Jesus, it was spoken to Jews. So we have to approach it from the point of view of what would a Jew have made of it.

The most common, well, there are two common takes, two and a half, that I've heard on this. One is that the lump of dough becoming fully leavened is symbolic of the church increasing in stature and size throughout the entire world.

Can anybody think of a problem with that explanation? What does leaven usually represent in Scripture? Sin. Sin. So it's unlikely to me that that would be a viable explanation.

[ 9 : 16 ] The other is that the leaven does represent sin burgeoning in the kingdom of God. How would the kingdom of God be like something that would get you more and more and more full of sin?

It doesn't add up to me. A third, which is my half really, is a similar principle for the human heart. It describes the human heart with sin burgeoning in the human heart, which of course, from that you need to be saved.

But it still doesn't add up because it doesn't say the human heart. It says the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God in the other Gospels. This is supposed to describe the kingdom. How on earth can a lump of dough becoming fully leavened describe the kingdom of God?

I think you'll agree it's a bit of a conundrum. So I believe all of those are wrong and I'm not pretending that there aren't others out there.

I just haven't found them yet. But I do believe the key to this is in the Old Testament and in the law. Just as we found with the mustard seed, the key was in the law, wasn't it?

[10:28] The fact that the law of diverse kinds and what it meant to break that law in order to bring forth the church age. Well, in the Old Testament law, I think we have indications, indications, shall we say.

So let's try to break it down. It says, the kingdom is like leaven that a woman took. So, I'm going to presume that we don't need to belabor the point that leaven is usually paralleled with sin.

How sin, once it gets in, it increases and multiplies and people become more and more and more sinful unless they're saved. And salvation is supposed to set you on a track of sanctification which means sin then gets less and less and less and eventually you're glorified.

But what about the woman? You see, in the previous parables, the person involved, the actor, the one carrying out the action, in the parable of the sower was who?

Jesus. Some would say the father. But in any event, whichever way you interpret it, it's God. Right. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the landowner, the one that planted the mustard seed, was God.

[12:03] Now, if we're going to be consistent in our interpretation of the parables, we have a situation where the woman sowing the lump of dough with leaven also has to in some way be God.

Now, that, of course, if one isn't careful, particularly when you stand up in front of a church and say these things, you get rained on by the fact that you cannot suggest that God is a woman. I am not suggesting that God is a woman.

However, the main actor in this case is definitely female and she's taken leaven and she's deliberately seeded the flour with leaven, with yeast.

And if we're to be consistent in our interpretation, that must be a divine seeding of the leaven with yeast. With me so far? Don't jump ahead of me or you might get offended.

The Holy Spirit, ruach, is actually a neuter noun so it can express femininity or masculinity. There are some scholars and I'm not among them that claim that the gender of the Holy Spirit is feminine and I would not go that far.

[13:24] Right? It's not for me that it's a step too far with this idea. However, it's undeniable that the scriptures show that he, the Holy Spirit, sometimes undertakes seemingly feminine roles or perspectives.

And we'll look at just a couple of examples just to make the point. If you go to Numbers 11, and look at verse 12, you've got God speaking and I would say this is almost certainly the Holy Spirit speaking and he says was it I who conceived all this people?

Was it I who brought them forth that you should say to me carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant to the land which you swore to their fathers.

This has very feminine overtones doesn't it? It doesn't say God's a man but it does attribute to God feminine care for the people of God as if!

caring! for a nursing child it's a woman that nurses a child not a man and you can see why people get tangled in this because God is showing feminine attributes whilst being a man but then if you think back to creation and man was created by God and within God there has to be the completeness of masculinity and femininity and so in that first man there must have been the completeness of both masculinity and femininity and then God took a rib or if you read the Hebrew it can mean a side took a side of Adam and created a separate being so did he take the feminine side and I'm being careful because that's not clearly what it says but it could be but it's interesting isn't it that when you put life which is one of the attributes of

[15:44] God so mankind created in the image of God has this property of God that they can create life you following me so far Deuteronomy 32 and we read over these but we don't associate it with masculinity or femininity you neglected the rock who begot you and forgot the God who gave you birth well giving birth is a feminine attribute verse 18 Deuteronomy 32 verse 18 you neglected the rock who begot you and forgot the God who gave you birth and we wouldn't stop and think so God must be a woman then and I wouldn't want you to think that but femininity is contained within God is all the point I want to make here in Proverbs 120 go to there now in

Proverbs I'm not going to do all of these references because I've only got 45 minutes and I've got a lot to get through but the references are Proverbs 1 verse 20 and 21 and you can read from Proverbs 8 verse 1 right through to Proverbs 9 verse 12 and there are many many references to wisdom and it's obvious that those references are references to divine wisdom and they are attributed a feminine gender so Proverbs 1 verse 20 wisdom shouts in the street she lifts her voice in the square at the head of the noisy streets she cries out at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings this is divine wisdom being attributed feminine characteristics I can't speak to you but as a married man I get an awful lot of wisdom from my wife quite often when I'm not being very wise at all so it's am I saying the

Holy Spirit is a woman absolutely not however both femininity and masculinity are contained within God so that he from time to time is seen to show and be the source of godly feminine characteristics is that a statement which doesn't get me stoned later so my contention is that the woman who is adding the yeast to the wheat in keeping with the other parables is a divine sowing of wheat that this is God acting upon the wheat so let's follow this forward and consider what is the significance of the wheat and this is where I when I started to study this I was completely taken aback and it took me a while to get my head around it the Greek word for a measure three measures of wheat the

Greek word for a measure is the word saton which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew seer so it was three seers of wheat and when you if you were a Hebrew you would know that the grain offering was traditionally one ephah of wheat well three omers equals one seer and three seers equals one ephah so the seer was the measure of wheat according to what we just read and you take three seers of wheat which makes an ephah of wheat which is the unleavened flour for the grain offering I haven't lost anybody yet I hope right so to any Jew Jesus saying a woman took three measures of wheat they'd immediately think grain offering because you wouldn't use an ephah of wheat to make bread because you'd have enough bread for a small army it's quite a large measure you would normally make a small loaf with an oma or two of wheat so this is a large amount of wheat and so the listeners would be saying to themselves he's talking about the grain offering being leavened that doesn't add up and that's when they wander away scratching their heads and when others the true believers the ones if you remember the purpose of the parables was to hide things from the

Jews who were unbelieving the ones who had rejected Messiah so the ones who hadn't rejected Messiah would have gone to him saying what do you mean why would we have leaven in the grain offering so you can see why Bible teachers get confused with this and I understand that because it took me a lot of hard work to get where I am so I really hope I'm right so he's used a descriptor that all of the people hearing it would have made the connection this is talking about the grain offering so Jesus was saying the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel the kingdom of God in the other gospels same thing was like leaven that God took in the form of personified by the woman and hid the yeast in the grain offering so it was done secretly what are we supposed to make of that

[ 21 : 53 ] I'm so glad you asked Leviticus 2 let's just clarify this offering well let's see where we go with it I get confused enough when I'm trying to follow my own notes if I try to follow your thought process I will be terribly confused Leviticus chapter 2 verses 1 to 4 now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the Lord his offering shall be of fine flour and he shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it he shall then bring it to Aaron's sons the priests and shall take from it his handful of its fine flour and of its oil with all of its frankincense and the priest shall offer it up in smoke as a memorial portion on the altar an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the

Lord and the remainder of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons a thing most holy and the offering to the Lord by fire now when you are to bring an offering of a grain offering baked in an oven it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with the oil or unleavened wafers spread with oil now there's another load that you could read in Leviticus 6 verses 14 to 17 I've put them in the notes I'm not going to read them now because I'm going to run out of time but the point was very strongly on pain of death if you're making a grain offering to the Lord it has to be unleavened I'm going to just put up a slide a single slide all those who are listening to this online will just have to forgive me for a moment so this is a little chart that will be in the notes and you will note that down in this column here you've got the significance is there what the offering was supposed to mean and in the case of the grain offering the purpose was to show honour and respect for God in worship and

the significance was that it acknowledges that all we have and all we are belongs to God but in terms of what the grain offering represented and you notice that all the offerings represent Christ in one way or another and this one represents that Christ was the perfect man who gave all of himself to God for the purpose of saving others so to a Jew the grain offering was a portrayal a metaphor for the Messiah there was something about this grain offering that made them think of the characteristics of the Messiah and of course one of the characteristics of the Messiah was he was sinless unleavened with me so far and you're still thinking so what's that got to do with the price of chips Christ was the perfect man the grain offering represents Christ and suddenly we've taken the grain offering and

God himself has filled it with leaven so he who knew no sin became sin for us now this makes sense to me the other teachings that I have heard didn't but this makes sense to me that we're talking about the grain offering which was sinless unleavened somehow it has to become leavened because he has to take on his shoulders he has to have imputed to him the sins of the world well so how was that a secret well they certainly didn't get it did they they went away scratching their heads and it the secret wasn't even revealed really when

Matthew wrote his gospel because he didn't comment on it I so wish he had but why Jesus was there was a mystery they all thought that the messiah was going to come and set them free from Rome and not only that but their mental attitude was that Israel had to become the centre of the known world again it had to be it was world domination for Israel was what they expected Messiah to give them which of course eventually that will be the case different bible study but when you get to the end of the tribulation the second coming the whole of the remaining Jewish nation will be saved so there is a whole thing to do there not yet done so in a sense they're right but what they didn't expect was

[ 28 : 02 ] Messiah to turn up and simply take their sins on board and this doctrine of imputation is a it's a very important one for us to grasp because our sins were imputed credited to the account of Jesus and his righteousness was credited to the account of us and he hung on the cross sinless but carrying our sins and we walk about the earth righteous but still paddling around in our own sins it's very counterintuitive and yet perfect because there was no other way for him to save us so the hidden nature the Jews all expected Messiah to turn up and put an end to Rome and put them in charge of the world I'm so glad he didn't what a mess the world would be in when you think of what we've studied about how messed up the

Jews were at the time that he was here but they were looking for a military style leader and they rejected the offer of the kingdom back in Matthew 12 and they rejected the king of that kingdom and so the kingdom was postponed and Jesus now had to pay for the sins of the very people that rejected him the very people that put him on the cross as well as the sins of the Gentile world then and now and so and so the meal offering which was a picture of sinless Jesus had to become leavened had to be filled with sin had to hung on the cross found guilty of sin for us let's remind ourselves just so that you know I didn't make it up 2nd

Corinthians 5 2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 21 in fact we'll read verse 20 because it completes the sentence or the thought therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were making an appeal through us we beg you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God he made him Jesus who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him and the scripture means to be the sin offering for us Jesus never sinned so he couldn't be sin in that sense but he became the sin offering in the same sense as the goat at the feast of atonement was an offering for sin in the same way as the

Passover lamb was an offering for sin at Passover Jesus became sin the sin offering for us so that we would be delivered from that another interesting thing about this when you picture it because then if you think the Jews would either pan cook or they would oven bake this grain offering and once if you've got leavened bread and you put it in an oven or in a pan to cook it what happens to the action of the yeast the leaven it's killed it dies it has no further you put your loaf in to prove but at the end the loaf that you get has no live yeast left in it it kills the action of the leaven so by Jesus being the grain offering and becoming leavened and facing the fires of God's wrath the effect of the leaven the sin was done away am I mad or does this make sense so in this parable this perfect grain offering symbolically takes on sin leaven as Jesus did to fulfil his mission which you can read in Matthew chapter 1 verse 21 to save his people from their sins so the kingdom of heaven is like a situation in which God takes on sin so that the kingdom can be free from sin 1 Peter 2 24 if

you want to turn there a scripture that we're very familiar with and he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness for by his wounds we were healed that's the doctrine of imputation being put into practice there he bore our sins sin was imputed to him so that we might die to sin and you can read the same principle in

[ 33 : 35 ] Isaiah 53 verse 11 and Hebrews 9 verse 28 they all say that Jesus bore our sins if you like became leavened and the fire of God's wrath rendered sin inactive in the believer the day you were saved you were saved from the consequences of sin you carried on sinning and I guess unless you are a lot better than me or anybody else I know you still are sinning but the final outcome for believers if you go to Revelation 21 and verse 27 which you can't really read where you could but we'll read the whole thought John writes this I saw no temple in it this is the new heaven the new earth for the Lord God the almighty and the lamb are its temple and the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it for the glory of

God has illuminated it and its lamp is the lamb the nations will walk by its light and the! kings of the earth will and they will bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life that includes us I can't wait now so when we read from Matthew 13 we read a quotation from the Psalms go back to Matthew 13 the quote from the Psalms was verse 35 this was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet I will open my mouth in parables I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world that quotation is from

Psalms 78 and I sent a message out to say if you get a chance read Psalm 78 before you come let's turn to Psalm 78 because it would complete the day having made the connection between Psalm 78 and what's going on in Israel at the time that Matthew's gospel is written and it's a fairly succinct thing for us to pick out so if you look at Psalm 78 which is a very long psalm and we're not going to read all of it but it starts off listen oh my people to my instruction incline your ears to the words of my mouth I will open my mouth in parables I will utter dark sayings of old and so this is where we need to remember that we don't ever when we get a quotation given in the New Testament that we look for in the Old

Testament we don't ever just cherry pick the one verse because particularly with Matthew that quotation would have been given to them because they're Jews and because they know their Bibles and they would have thought of Psalm 78 as a whole entity and they would have thought to themselves what's the message of Psalm 78 78 going to speak to them in parables why is he speaking in parables and how does that relate to our situation today they might have said well first of all Psalm 78 is what's called a masculine and masculine is a didactic or an instructive poem it's supposed to give instruction and it's addressed to a very hard hearted Israel at a time!

when despite God's demonstrations of miraculous power and his care for his people, they just ignored him. And if you read through the psalm, those of you that had a chance, you'll find that over and over again, you get this, you know, I did this miracle and you ignored me and I did that miracle and I took you through the Red Sea and you ignored me and so on and so on and so on.

[ 37 : 55 ] It caused quail to fall out of the sky so you could have meat to eat because that's what you fancied and I even gave you what you fancied and you still rejected and ignored me. That's the message of Psalm 78. And the time to which Matthew refers in his gospel is very redolent, very, has the same flavour as this time. He's turned up, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, went to Egypt to avoid being slain by Herod, came back, has performed all the messianic miracles and more, has only ever shown loving kindness, has never lost his temper, has shown a level of wisdom that they've not been able to fathom. We've never heard anybody teach like this. And by the way, that should be what churches do.

People should come into church and go, wow, I've never heard anything like this. Oh, but we could live up to that. But he's done everything. He fulfilled the scriptures. He walked on the road to Emmaus and he said to the two on the road to Emmaus, it says he spoke to them from the scriptures, the things concerning himself.

The very thing that they were looking for, someone that would fulfil the scriptures, he was that someone. And when they rejected him, back when Psalm 78 was written, there were consequences.

And if you look at Psalm 78 verse 31, the anger of God rose against them and killed some of their stoutest ones and subdued the choice men of Israel.

In spite of all this, they still sinned. So all the ones that were put up on pedestals in Israel, God came along and slew them to wake people up to the fact that they were putting the wrong one on the pedestal.

[ 40 : 15 ] They should have been putting the living God on a pedestal. Verses 21 and 22 say a similar thing of the same psalm. So their continual rejection of God, in the end, produced a fiery response.

And tragically, if we go to verse 34. When he killed them, then they sought him and returned and searched diligently for God.

Jesus is warning them using parables of the same outpouring of wrath referred to in Psalm 78 for their current conduct. And they are...

They've come to this point where they've rejected him and these consequences, including the fiery wrath of God, are going to come upon them.

Which, of course, it did in AD 70. Although AD 70 is not the end of it. Because at the end of the great tribulation period yet to come, there will be a time when every unbelieving Jew is slain.

[ 41 : 54 ] And therefore, only believing Jews will be left and all Israel will be saved. So I'm hoping that that has tied together some loose ends for us.

And I bless you for your patience. And if you think I'm mad, come and talk to me afterwards.