

Introduction:

- A. When Jesus, full of God's Spirit, came out of the wilderness to begin preaching, he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." And that got people's attention because the Jews had been waiting for God's kingdom to come for a long, long time.
- Jesus taught about life with God like no one they had ever heard. He did the very kinds of miracles that the prophets promised the Messiah would do. He cast demons out of tormented people, demons who called him "the Son of God." He forgave sins and people's hearts were healed. He even raised a dead girl back to life. So a lot of people believed him that the kingdom of heaven was near. And they gathered around the kingdom's door like the crowds waiting for stores to open the day after Thanksgiving.
- B. Many thought Jesus might be the Messiah that God had promised but only a few gave him their hearts. Just a few saw how poor in spirit they were. Just a handful hungered for a righteousness they'd never tasted. Just a little group saw that mercy was their only hope, and that Jesus offered God's mercy. They became his disciples and he was their Lord. Not many, but a few.
- C. Then Jesus began speaking to the crowds in code. In fact, in time he *only* spoke in code. A kind of spiritual code—parables. Contrary to what you hear sometimes, Jesus didn't tell stories to make things clearer. He told parables to encode the secrets of God's kingdom. Everyone could listen, but only those with a decoder kind of heart would get the whole message. The real point.
- D. For example, Jesus told them about a farmer who sowed seed, and how that seed fell on different kinds of soil, and most seed didn't last. But some seed, in just the right soil, bore fruit like crazy! I'm sure no one in the crowd thought Jesus was talking about farming, but only those who *asked*

him what he *did* mean began to see that the coded message was that only Jesus himself could make the word of God bear fruit in them.

- E. It must have been a lonely feeling for those few disciples. All those people following Jesus and yet, as near as God's kingdom was, they weren't really listening. They'd look at these stories and not really see. How could Jesus possibly bring in God's kingdom when there were so few who heard? When they were so weak? So small?

Another story, encoded: vv.24-30...

That was it. Just the story. They waited for the preacher's, "So..." but it never came. The story just hung there. And people started to put meaning to it, the way people do when then look at a curious painting, or listen to an orchestra play a piece called *Opus 29*. "I know it means something!"

I'm sure most people thought, "Well, I know it isn't really a story about wheat and weeds, right?" But Jesus wasn't talking.

"It's about God's people and Satan and judgment, right?"

Nothing.

I imagine people began nodding knowingly, as if to say, "Yes sir, isn't that just the way it is. God's judgment is a terrible thing. I see your point."

Only a few thought, "I'm missing something important here. Something... something doesn't quite add up. I need to know. Jesus knows something I don't understand."

Again, parables. Codes hidden in plain sight. vv.31-33...

This was easier. "God's kingdom is going to get really big. All nations coming to us right here in Israel. Like when David was king." Some remembered how Ezekiel told how Israel would become a great tree and "birds of every kind would nest in it"—the nations nesting in Israel. [Ezek 17:23] "Ah yes, that is going to be a great day, and it won't be long now!"

The women chuckled at the second parable. *Sixty pounds of flour! And then you add yeast?! Get out of the kitchen, Martha! That's enough for 100 people! Huge! And that's what the kingdom of heaven is going to be like?! You could feed an army!*

Everyone in the crowd grinned and pulses quickened, and people dreamed a little of how great it would be to be great. Soon.

Now Matthew, the preacher who we're listening to, tells us something about Jesus' code language: vv.34-35... Wait! Play back those stories... *"A farmer went out to sow his seed."* And the other sower story—the enemy, the weeds, the harvest and bonfire. The big mustard plant. The enormous loaf of bread. *I'm not seeing "things hidden since the creation of the world," are you? You're saying that there are secrets no one has ever heard, right there in those stories? What are we missing? Makes you wonder, doesn't it?*

There were a few who knew they had missed something, so they did what anyone could have done; what you can do. V.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.'"* Excellent! Now we're getting somewhere. And Jesus willingly shares the code. Do you remember your first code experience? It was probably a bunch of random numbers, separated by hyphens. Then you get the code: 1=A, 2=B, 3=C... like that. Well, Jesus does that. **Vv.37-43...**

So why the code? What's the big secret? Why doesn't he just tell everyone straight up? The funny thing is that the Bible here does just that. Anyone can read this—the coded story and the code that unlocks it. You see, it isn't really the story that hides the meaning. **The meaning is hidden in knowing Jesus.** Think of being Jesus' disciples once the truth began to dawn on them? All those crowds. The kingdom right here, right now. So close! Wide open. But only a few disciples trust him. So few. So weak. So little.

Illus.: Do you remember hearing how the ordinary quilts of slaves actually were secret signals and symbols of freedom? **Parables tell secrets of God’s kingdom that God’s people *must* know and that everyone else dismisses as unimportant.** Let’s decipher Jesus’ message in these parables to his disciples:

First, there’s something in every parable that’s small—*really* small. But that’s no surprise. God has always started small.

Abraham—one man, blessed by God, becomes the father of a people as countless as the stars in the sky. Gideon’s small band defeats a huge army or “only a boy named David” brings down the giant Goliath. No secret there. **In what sense is a follower of Jesus small? How are we like seeds?**

I. THE FIRST SECRET IS NOT HOW SMALL WE ARE, BUT HOW WE ARE SMALL

- A. **Illus.:** The other day a nonchristian friend told me that he thought the morality of Jesus and Buddha were similar. So I told him about Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. There is a lot of moral teaching there, but the effect is to reduce us—to show us just how far out of reach righteousness really is for us—till we realize just how poor and hungry and helpless we are. And when we admit that poverty Jesus says, *There! Now “yours is the kingdom of heaven!”* He also said, *“Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”* Jesus said that entry into the kingdom of heaven was via a narrow road and small gate. That’s why only small people get in.
- B. And now, our littleness and weakness is the secret to our strength in this weed-infested field, because God displays *his* strength, love, wisdom, and grace through *weak* people, even those suffering the thorns of Satan. God told Paul when he pleaded for healing, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* [2 Cor 12:9] **The devil wounds and weakens us with his weeds but that is where God stages his strength, and where the kingdom grows.** And all that is the secret of our success.

There's a similar idea in the parables about the mustard plant and the loaf of bread. You look and see a big plant and large loaf. But...

II. THE SECRET IS NOT HOW BIG THE KINGDOM GROWS, BUT HOW SMALL IT STARTS (vv.31-33)

- A. Don't look at that big mustard plant, with the birds nesting in it. The point of the code is how tiny the seed was. That's what we're like as God's people. The tiniest seed; but we're a *seed!* Get it! Don't look at that big loaf of bread. Look at the wee bit of yeast that works such a mysterious miracle of bigness. We're such a little addition to such a big loaf, but we're *yeast* in that loaf! Get it! Think on that!

The parable tells us about the spiritual eco-terrorism of the devil—sowing weeds among God's wheat in order to destroy the people of God's kingdom. No one who knew anything about God's kingdom expected sabotage! God's kingdom is supposed to come in a rush of triumph—battle gear burned, lions lying down with lambs, peace as pervasive as sunshine. *Layin' down our burdens. Studyin' war no more.* Like that. Then, Jesus' coded message:

III. THE SECRET IS THAT GOD PERMITS THE DEVIL TO SABOTAGE HIS FIELD AND YET, DESPITE THE WEEDS, THE WHEAT MATURES

- A. The first surprise is that the devil is able to infiltrate the kingdom of heaven. According to **v.41**, the weeds represent "*everything that causes sin and all who do evil.*" Why does God let that happen? How could God possibly sleep while Satan ruined his field—sowing the seeds of destruction in the very kingdom of God? That's a surprise because everyone thought God's kingdom *coming* meant the devil's power *ending*. But they didn't realize the kingdom would come as it did, quietly and inwardly at first. And they didn't know the ancient secret.
- B. Jesus says that if he pulled up all the weeds in his kingdom the wheat wouldn't actually mature. That's a strange bit of farming, actually. What gardener doesn't weed her garden for fear of pulling up the good plants? What farmer

doesn't weed his field and still hopes for even half a harvest? Well... God!

It has happened before, and it happened at the cross. Satan thinks he sabotages God but God turns the attack to his purpose. Let me put it plainly: **In the way of God, Jesus' disciples mature because we are crowded and choked by "everything that causes sin and all who do evil."** What would we know of meekness or mercy, of thirsting for righteousness or the value of a pure heart, if it weren't for those terrible weeds? How would we ever become like Christ? And what a victory in the end for the Lord who turned the devil's own scheme into the secret of high-yield wheat farming!

- C. Thoughtful disciples get a little edgy hearing this. What if the weeds get me? What if I'm choked to death by the evil around me? The code—the parable—tells us that the weeds don't win. The devil's eco-terrorism fails. The Bible tells us that again and again. **Phil. 1:6:** *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Despite the weeds. **1 Cor 1:8-9,** *"He will keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."* All the things *"that causes sin and all who do evil"* cannot choke Christ's life out of us. **The amazing secret is that God's people mature despite Satan's best efforts to destroy us.**

Then there is the sobering destiny of those weeds. Jesus speaks to crowds and many in those crowds, despite being *that close* to Jesus, will never get small enough to enter the kingdom of heaven. Those people, who think that if they call Jesus 'Lord' they're good to go, will find they have been the agents of the evil one. And at the harvest time they will be thrown into hell.

IV. THE SAD SECRET IS THAT ALL WHO ARE NOT “THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM” ARE “THE PEOPLE OF THE EVIL ONE” AND ARE DESTINED FOR HELL.

- A. When God harvests his field—this world—there are only two outcomes. There are sheaves of wheat and burn piles of weeds. There’s not a third category for good people who are not followers of Jesus, for people who are nice and mean well. And the people of the kingdom are only those who are small enough to come to Jesus in repentance and faith.
- B. And the open secret—the thing people really don’t believe very often—is that hell is personal, a terrible and endless dying, the result of God’s judgment. **Vv.41-42...** But almost no one who listens thinks that could be them.

And finally, the secret is what will become of us. So small. So few. So weak. **V.46...**

V. THE SECRET IS THAT, DESPITE STARTING SO SMALL, “THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE LIKE THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THEIR FATHER.” (v.46)

- A. We’ve learned that we don’t become righteous by trying to be better people. We start becoming righteous when we get small enough to repent and believe the good news Jesus brings us. Then Jesus plants his word in us and his righteousness starts to grow within us, the way a seed grows, and we bear the fruit of righteousness in our character, relationships, and church.
- B. Jesus’ words here were familiar to his Jewish audience, because they’re in the OT, in **Dan 12:1-3**, about the end times... That is what I’m living for! That’s the secret of our success.

Conclusion

Things hidden from the creation of the world are all right there in those parables. Plain as day. Clear as crystal. But in code that only the tender-hearted can hear and see. Do these secrets mean

anything to you? Do you delight to hear the message whispering through the wheat? Jesus said, *“Whoever has ears, let them hear.”*