

The Grace of God Seen in Weeds, Seeds, and Leaven

Matthew 13:24–43

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Introduction

We are now in year four of studying the Gospel of Matthew here at New Baptist Church, and as we begin 2026, we find ourselves in chapter 13 — a collection of parables that Jesus told. Down in verse 34 of our passage today we are told, “All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable.” In the Gospel of Matthew there are twenty-two parables, most of them concentrated in chapters 13, 24, and 25. It is my opinion that most of these parables were not one-time teachings, but were used by Jesus over and over again, helping to reveal the hidden things of the Kingdom.

Last week we looked at the parable of the four soils in the first half of Matthew 13, where the good seed — the word of the kingdom — falls on four different soils representing the hearts of the hearers: hard, anxious, distracted, and good. Several people mentioned to me afterward that they sometimes feel like they are multiple soils at once. That comment tells me they are actually hearing the parable, because parables not only reveal the hidden things of God — they also reveal the hidden things of our hearts. And what makes the good soil good is precisely this: seeing the hardness, the anxiousness, and the distractions in it, and repenting of them.

Today we are looking at three parables, and though there is a great deal in each of them, the theme that rises to the surface is grace — grace seen in weeds, seeds, and leaven.

God’s preserving grace, keeping and protecting His own. God’s sufficient grace, made powerful in our weakness. And God’s irresistible grace, bringing to completion what it began.

The Gap That Parables Bridge

Have you ever tried to explain something to someone, and they simply couldn’t get it? Or the reverse — having something explained to you that you could not follow no matter how hard you tried? People who have gone on short-term mission trips are always eager to share their experience, but when they try, they quickly discover that those to whom they speak don’t fully

understand. Those who served in the military cannot really explain what that life is like to those who haven't lived it. The same is true of certain traumas, of growing up poor or disadvantaged or disabled — words fail, and explanations fall short. The harder we try, the more frustrated we become. We use more words, speak more slowly, repeat ourselves, and still the other person doesn't quite get it. The problem usually isn't a lack of vocabulary or intelligence on either side. It's that some realities can only be truly grasped through experience.

With that in mind, consider the challenge Jesus faced. He came to reveal the Kingdom of Heaven — spiritual truths about God's kingdom — to people trapped in earthly thinking. He came to explain eternal realities to those bound by time. How do you describe the Father in Heaven to those who have never known Him? How do you explain a kingdom no one has yet seen?

The primary way God bridges this gap is through the Incarnation itself. The Word of God, the Son of God, becomes flesh and dwells among us. God steps into our world. And it is through Jesus that we behold His glory, full of grace and truth. But another way Jesus bridges this gap is through parables. Earlier in Matthew 13:10, the disciples ask, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" and Jesus answers, "Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." That is not merely a comment about learning styles — it is a statement about the human heart. Parables have a way of building a bridge over this gap of ignorance for those who are spiritually humble and hungry.

This purpose of parables is expressed again in our passage today. Look at verses 34 and 35:

All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

Do you see what this is telling us? It is through Jesus' parables that hidden things are revealed. Parables are the means by which Jesus discloses the hidden things of God — things like His kingdom, His grace, the human heart, judgment, and the importance of repentance. Parables are how Jesus takes invisible realities and clothes them in ordinary things that people can see and feel: a farmer throwing seed on the ground, crops growing in a field, birds nesting in branches, a woman working dough. Parables are not Jesus hiding spiritual realities. They are Jesus revealing them.

When I began working on this message, my goal was to address everything these three parables teach. It became clear very quickly that I was writing a seminar, not a sermon. One of the primary themes running through all three is how the Kingdom starts small and grows — which is also a picture of how God works in our lives. And that work is a work of grace. So I have narrowed my focus to one theme: grace.

What is grace? Grace is God's free gift of salvation through Christ — unearned, undeserved, given not because of our merit or works, but solely because of His goodness and His faithful love toward us. It is because of grace that what is ours — our sin, our shame, our condemnation, our judgment — has been taken by Christ. And what is His — His eternal life, His righteousness, His sonship, His Spirit — is given freely to us. *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.*

And yet, grace is so astonishing, so utterly free, that our hearts struggle to hold onto it. Many believers understand their need for forgiveness and know that their salvation comes by grace through Christ — but somewhere along the way, their Christian life slips back into effort and striving, into a desperate attempt to merit God's favor. They begin to believe it is up to them to keep their salvation. They assume the stronger they are, the more rules they keep, the more God will bless them. They act as though it is their own effort and hard work that will complete what God began, as though they are responsible for perfecting their own souls.

Our three parables today help us understand just how astonishing God's grace really is.

The Parable of the Weeds: God's Preserving Grace

The first parable is the longest. It runs from Matthew 13:24 to 30, and Jesus explains it beginning in verse 36. Let's read it together.

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

And now Jesus' own explanation, beginning in verse 36:

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

There is a great deal happening in this parable. It tells us that God is good and the gospel is good — that the confusion, chaos, and corruption we see in this world and in our own lives does not come from God, but from the enemy, whom Jesus names plainly: the evil one, the devil. The parable also tells us that there will come a moment when God says *enough*, and He puts a decisive end to all that is evil, to all that causes sin, to all lawbreakers. To anyone who has ever wrestled with why God permits evil in this world, this is genuinely good news. Evil has an expiration date. God will not allow sin, wickedness, and injustice to continue forever — He has set a day when He will make all things right, and all those who trust in Christ will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom.

But today my focus is grace, so where is grace in this parable? It is in verses 28 and 29, where the servants ask the master, "Do you want us to go and pull out the weeds?" And the master responds: "No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them."

Do you hear the grace in that? God is more concerned with the wheat than He is with the weeds. He would rather allow the weeds to remain than to lose even one blade of wheat. Which means that you — your soul, your life with Him — is more precious to God, more important to Him, than bringing an immediate end to evil and injustice right now.

This tells me that God's grace is patient. God's grace protects and preserves. He will not lose those who are His.

Think about what this says about how important you are to God. He is more concerned with keeping and saving His people than with bringing immediate judgment. Jesus is saying that the very reason God delays judgment is to protect you. God has, in a very real sense, arranged the entire timeline of history around preserving His people — around preserving you. Which means you are secure in Him. He is not going to let you go. The harvest is coming, and when it does, those who are in Christ will be gathered safely into His barn.

Because of this preserving and protecting grace, you can have genuine assurance of your salvation — not because your grip on God is strong enough, but because His grip on you is.

You do not have to exhaust yourself trying to prove you are wheat and not a weed. God knows His own. That anxious self-examination, the constant questioning — *Am I really saved? Am I really His?* — that is not the fruit of faith. That is the fruit of fear. If you are in Christ, you are wheat. Period.

This also means you can face the evil around you, and even the sin within you, with confidence rather than despair. Yes, there are weeds in the field. Yes, there is wickedness in the world, and if we are honest, there are still weeds in our own hearts. But God's preserving grace is powerful enough to keep you safe until the harvest. The presence of weeds does not threaten the wheat. The Master will deal with them at the appointed time.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed: God's Sufficient Grace

Our next parable is brief. It is found in verses 31 and 32:

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."

Where is grace in this parable? It is here: God takes something small and weak and uses it for Himself and for His kingdom.

Now, to be clear, a mustard seed does not grow into an oak tree. It is not a cedar. In fact, it technically never becomes a tree at all — it is, as Jesus says, a garden plant that grows so large it functions like a tree, a place where birds gather. If you live in West Virginia, you can picture this easily enough. In my own backyard there is a thicket of kudzu and vines and I am not entirely sure what else — and it is absolutely full of birds, more so than the large trees surrounding it.

We tend to look at ourselves and think: *Compared to so-and-so, I am nothing. Look at that person — he is like a mighty oak, doing great things for God. Not me. I'm just a little mustard plant. I can't do anything significant for God.*

But this is exactly what grace does. It takes the small and the weak things of the world and reveals in them God's power, His purpose, and His work. Grace does not wait for you to become something impressive before God uses you. Grace takes you as you are — small, overlooked, ordinary — and does something extraordinary with you. That is what grace does.

Because of this sufficient grace made powerful in weakness, you do not need to disqualify yourself from God's service because you feel too small or too inadequate. Stop comparing your

mustard plant to someone else's cedar tree. God did not call you to be them. He called you to be faithful with what He has planted in you. That person you admire? They started as a seed too. That impressive ministry you look at? It began small and weak, just like yours. God grows what He plants.

And you do not have to wait until you feel strong enough, mature enough, or ready enough before you serve. Grace does not work that way. Grace works precisely in your weakness. Paul learned this: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* God is not waiting for you to get your act together. He is waiting for you to trust that His grace is enough right now, right where you are.

Small acts of faithfulness matter to God. You may never preach to thousands, write books, or lead a massive ministry — but you can love your neighbor, speak a kind word, pray for the broken, serve in the nursery, visit the lonely. In other words, you can be the kind of person where the birds of the air find shelter. God has a way of turning mustard seeds into places where weary souls find rest.

The Parable of the Leaven: God's Irresistible Grace

Our last parable today is a single verse, found in Matthew 13:33:

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."

Where is God's grace here? To me, this parable reveals that God's grace is irresistible — which means that when God's grace begins its work in a person, it will complete that work. We read this promise in Philippians 1:6: *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

The three measures of flour described here is a massive amount — roughly fifty pounds of dough. That is a lot of pizza. How much yeast does it take to leaven fifty pounds of dough? Yeast is even smaller than a mustard seed, and yet just a little of it, given enough time, will leaven all fifty pounds. Now — can you see the yeast at work? No. That is why it is hidden. It is working through the dough, silently changing and transforming it over a long period of time.

This is exactly how God's grace works in you. His leavening work is often invisible. There is no sound, there is no dramatic transformation you can point to — but given time, just as that leaven works its way through every bit of the dough, so does God's grace work through every part of you.

When you are saved by God's grace, the sanctifying work of the Spirit goes to work in you. You may feel as though nothing is happening. There are still weeds in your life. You still struggle with wrong thoughts and wrong actions. You look at yourself and wonder: *Am I really changing? Is God really at work in me?*

But here is the promise: what God began in you, He will complete. The work may be hidden right now. You may not see the evidence of transformation as quickly as you would like. But grace is working — silently, invisibly, irresistibly — and it will not stop until the whole lump is leavened, until you are fully conformed to the image of Christ.

Because of this irresistible grace, you do not need to panic when you cannot see evidence of spiritual growth. Just because you don't see dramatic transformation doesn't mean God is not at work in you. Grace does not work on your timetable or according to your metrics. It works slowly, steadily, invisibly — but it never stops working. The same grace that saved you is sanctifying you, and it will not quit until you stand before Him fully transformed, conformed to the image of His Son.

You also do not need to manufacture your own sanctification through sheer willpower. You cannot leaven yourself any more than dough can leaven itself. The yeast does the work. The Spirit does the work. Your job is not to become holy by effort — your job is to abide in Christ and let His grace transform you from the inside out.

And let this also shape how you relate to other believers who seem stuck or struggling. If God's grace is at work in them — and you know it is, if they are in Christ — then His work will continue. We cannot see the hidden leaven. We do not know what God is doing beneath the surface. So let us be patient with one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, because the same invisible, irresistible grace that is at work in you is at work in them.

Rest in the promise: what God began, He will complete. You are not responsible for finishing the work — He is. The same grace that justified you will glorify you.

Closing

To those who have ears to hear and eyes to see — do you hear and see what Jesus has been telling us about His kingdom and His grace?

God's grace preserves you. He will not let you go. God's grace empowers you. He uses your weakness for His glory. God's grace perfects you. He will complete what He began.

This is the gospel. This is the good news. From start to finish, your salvation is not about your strength or your performance. It is about His grace — His unmerited, unearned, unstoppable grace toward you.

So today, I want to invite you to do something that might feel terrifying at first: stop. Stop striving. Stop trying to earn what has already been given. Stop white-knuckling your faith as if it all depends on you. And instead, rest. Rest in the preserving grace that holds you secure. Rest in the sufficient grace that makes you useful. Rest in the irresistible grace that guarantees your transformation.

If you are here today and you have never trusted Christ — if you have been trying to make yourself acceptable to God through your own goodness, your own religion, your own works — I have good news for you. Grace is offered freely. Christ died for sinners. He took what was yours — your sin, your shame, your judgment — and He offers you what is His: His righteousness, His life, His Spirit. You cannot earn it. You simply receive it by faith. Will you rest in His grace today?

Father, we thank You for Your amazing grace. We confess that we struggle to grasp how free it really is, how powerful it really is, how complete it really is. Help us to stop trying to save ourselves and sanctify ourselves and perfect ourselves. Help us to rest in Christ, to trust in Your preserving, sufficient, and irresistible grace. For those here who are weary from trying to be good enough — give them rest. For those who do not yet know You — open their eyes to see the beauty of the gospel. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.