

**Matthew 13:31-35. Parables of the mustard-seed and of the leaven.****~Other Speakers M-R: Favell Lee Mortimer:**

We will now consider several short parables that our Savior related, but of which he gave no interpretation; still we may endeavor from other parts of Scripture to discover their meaning. The seed of the mustard-tree is smaller in proportion to the size of the tree it produces, than any other seed. In eastern countries the mustard-tree has immense spreading branches, which afford a fit shelter for the birds.

The religion of Christ was very small in its beginning. Behold the stable in Bethlehem, and that weak babe sleeping in the manger. From him shall spring a multitude that no man can number, of glorious saints, who throughout eternity shall surround the throne of God. These his spiritual children shall exceed the stars in multitude. Already how wonderfully has the Christian religion spread! though preached at first by twelve poor unlearned men—the kings of many nations profess to believe in it. It shall spread yet further, until men shall not merely profess the name of Christ, but until all shall praise him with sincere lips—until all shall know the Lord from the greatest unto the least.

The next parable, of the leaven that leavened by degrees a large quantity of meal, much resembles the parable of the mustard-tree, and it has been generally supposed to have nearly the same meaning. There is one great difference between the parables; the growth of the mustard-tree is open; the effects of the leaven in the meal are secret. Some people have thought that while the growth of the mustard-tree represents the progress of the gospel in the world, the leavening of the meal shows its influence in the heart. The leaven is generally considered to signify the word of God, which works gradually and silently in the heart, as leaven works in meal.

But a learned writer, Rev. Alfred Jenour, has lately suggested, that as leaven is used in other places to represent wickedness, it may represent it here also. Paul says, in his epistle to the Corinthians, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump." (1 Cor. 5:7.) And Christ once said to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees;" by which he meant their false doctrine. (Matthew 16:12.) If leaven represents wickedness in this parable, then we learn from it how artfully Satan corrupts the pure religion of Christ; just as he sows tares among the wheat, so he mixes falsehood with truth.

By relating parables, our Lord fulfilled the prophecy of the seventy-eighth Psalm—"I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old." If we refer to that psalm, we shall find that it contains a history of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and of their passing through the wilderness. Was this history a parable? Yes, it was a parable, or dark saying, for all that happened to Israel had a hidden meaning. The apostle Paul, speaking of the afflictions of Israel, declares—"All these things happened to them for examples; and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. 10:11.) There is one event especially that took place in the wilderness, which is full of the richest instruction. That event is the lifting up of the bronze serpent. Few, perhaps, understood at the time what it signified. But we see in that serpent the image of Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh, crucified for our iniquities.

The Bible is full of dark sayings like this. Men naturally love mysteries and wonders. Why do they not love the Bible? Why does it lie neglected, while many foolish and hurtful books are eagerly devoured? Because men love sin, and the Bible speaks against it. Therefore Paul exhorts us to lay aside all malice, and deceit, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, that as new-born babes we may desire the sincere milk of the word. We cannot relish the Bible while we delight in sin.