

Perfectly Confused Luke 13:18-21

Have you ever been perfectly confused? *Ex. Calculus, 1st kid, relationships, 2020*

What about when reading the Bible? *Ever had those head scratching moments?*

Parables can be perfectly confusing as well! On the one hand they speak of heavenly realities using earthly things that can be seen, touched, & understood, but Jesus Himself said that He speaks in parable so that...

"Seeing they may not see & hearing they may not understand." Luke 8:10

Even for the disciples, who **"have been given to know the secret things of the Kingdom of God"**, they often had to ask Jesus what the parables meant.

These 2 parables in Luke 13 are examples of such head scratchers! Jesus doesn't give an explanation, so we have to try to connect the dots ourselves

On the surface they may seem pretty straightforward, & maybe they are!

The kingdom of God is like a seed that grows into a tree & it grows so large that birds can nest in it – meaning that **the kingdom of God is being planted in this world & it's going to be so effective that we all can find our place in it.**

This may be true but is it the meaning of Jesus' parable here in Luke 13?

Or what about the 2nd parable comparing the kingdom of God to leaven, or yeast, being mixed in flour with the end result being it all became leavened?

It seems to mean that the kingdom of God is going to spread until it reaches the ends of the earth. **That the kingdom of God will be present everywhere!**

Again, this makes total sense & it may be what Jesus meant, but there are a few things that make these parables confusing & much harder to interpret.

- **Mustard seeds do not grow into trees, they grow into bushes!** Yes, they are quite large bushes, but why would Jesus say it this way?
- Jesus speaks of birds nesting in the branches. **Birds are most often associated in the N.T. with the enemy (Parable of the Sower)**, or with that which holds very little value (5 sparrows sold for two pennies)!

What if these details matter? What if Jesus is trying to say something else in these parables? The Jews wanted a large earthly kingdom, & for themselves

What if Jesus was trying to say through this first parable that **the kingdom of God is being planted in this world but it is going to produce something far different than what you would have expected** (a tree and not a bush)!

And yes, people will find a place in God's kingdom, but what if the "they" are people you wouldn't want there – those who you would call evil or view as worthless? **All of a sudden, this Jesus story takes on a different meaning!**

Or think about the second parable – yeast being applied (or hidden) in dough, and then overnight it effects the whole lump.

Is the yeast the presence of God's people in the world, the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth, or does it represent something else?

- **Again, yeast in Scripture normally has a negative connotation (the yeast of the Pharisees)**, or it is something to be left out (the Passover).
- For yeast to be "hidden" in the dough almost implies a devious act. Could it be that the woman in this story is a representation of the evil one and that the yeast represents sin, hypocrisy, and/or false religion?

Here again, **the meaning & implication can be quite different depending on how we interpret the details in Jesus' stories.** Are we perfectly confused?

Are we talking about kingdom growth here or the spread of evil, or both?
Both can be true, and both can be pervasive!

Are we talking about long-term or short-term effects, or both?
A seed takes years to become a tree, yeast spreads quickly overnight!

Are we talking about a positive or negative eschatology, or both?
Which kingdom will be more successful in the end when Jesus returns?

How can we make sense of all of this and how does it apply to us today?

- **The kingdom of God and the forces of evil exist today simultaneously!**
- They both will expand, and at a rate we cannot determine!
- **The kingdom of God may look very different than what we would expect**
- The kingdom of God may include those we might normally reject!
- The kingdom of God & the forces of evil will advance under the surface!
- **The kingdom of God is not affected by what we do or don't understand!**

BRC is a perfectly good example of these perfectly confusing forces at work!

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