

Various “Kingdom” Parables

(Matthew 13)

Introduction

What’s the kingdom of heaven like? Do you know where the kingdom of God is? Is it someplace far off? No, it’s right here among us. It’s not another geographic location, it’s a spiritual realm where God rules and where we share in His eternal life. We join God’s kingdom when we trust in Jesus as our Savior. Jesus’ kingdom is in the hearts and lives of His followers.

Opening Prayer

Jesus, You were anxious for your true followers to know more about Your ways. We, too, want to come to a deeper understanding of how You want us to behave, Father, so that we can spread the Good News about You to everyone we meet. Please give us new insight into Your ways this morning. Give us a supernatural ability to understand the deeper things of You, Lord. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 13:35b)

Lesson

Today we’re going to look at several small parables of Jesus. Who remembers what a parable is? (It’s a true-to-life short story that is designed to teach a truth. See Matthew 13:34-35.)

Jesus taught in parables because He wanted His followers to learn to listen with their spiritual ears; that is, with their hearts. This is a deeper kind of listening; the kind that gives spiritual insight and understanding.

Jesus wanted people to know what the kingdom of heaven is like, so he compared it to things that they understood from their everyday lives. Keep in mind that when we talk of the kingdom of heaven, we’re talking about the general overall rule of God over this world.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32 (see also, Luke 19:18-19)

Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. (32) It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.”

The mustard seed was the smallest seed a farmer used. Some people believe that Jesus used this parable to show that the kingdom of heaven (that is, the influence of God over the world) has small beginnings but will grow and produce great results — providing great blessings to all who come into the family of God.

Size doesn’t mean it’s healthy. A normal mustard plant is only the size of a small bush. Just because it’s grown into the size of a tree, doesn’t mean that it’s better. In the same way, if a church becomes huge in number, it is not a sign that it is healthy. If the pastors get away from teaching the people from the Word of God they can infect people with lies about God’s kingdom.

Some people believe that this parable tells of how bad people can come into the kingdom of heaven. In other places in the Bible *birds* are a type of evil. In the parable of the Sower and the Seed, the birds came in and snatched up the seed that was scattered on the hard footpath. These birds were a type of Satan.

Jesus tells this parable right after he told the parable of the Wheat and the Tares that we studied last week. In that parable the tares (weeds) grew up in the field with the wheat and no one could really tell the difference until the time of the harvest.

This parable tells how as the kingdom of heaven grows here on earth. There are going to be people coming into our lives that say they are Christians and look like true believers, but are really not. Those are the “birds” that come in and *make nests in its branches*.

The Parable of the Leaven

Matthew 13:33 (see also, Luke 13:20-21)

Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

Who knows what leaven is? *Leaven* is a substance that you put into bread dough to make it rise. It produces a gas that makes the dough puff up.

In other Bible passages, yeast is used as a symbol of sin because it puffs up, just as pride puffs us up and makes us proud. Although yeast looks like a minor ingredient, it seeps into the whole loaf. This parable explains what happens when evil or sin is present within the church. If you leave the sin in the church, it will affect the whole body of believers in a bad way. You can’t even leave one small speck.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:44

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

What is the “field” in this parable? (The world) The kingdom of heaven is the family of believers in this world.

Who is the man? (Jesus) What did he do? Why does it say he sold all that he had to buy the field?

Philippians 2:5-7

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (6) Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. (7) Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,

Jesus “sold” all that he had by coming down out of Heaven to be born as a baby human. He temporarily gave up his position in glory to humble Himself as a man! And, He “bought” the field.

1 John 2:2

He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

Do you see what it cost Him? He went through a torturous death on the cross to pay for our sins. He took the punishment we deserve so that our debt to God the Father for our sins was fully paid and we can now come into Heaven when we die.

The parable says he bought the field. The “field” is a type of the world. That means that the Lord purchased the whole earth. He died for all sin. He did that in order to get the true believers, the treasure hidden in the field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45-46

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. (46) When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

Who is the “merchant”? (Jesus) Who is the “pearl” of great value? (The church.) God loves us with an everlasting love! What did Jesus do? He gave up his position at the right hand of God and allowed Himself to be sacrificed on our behalf.

The pearl is the only jewel that is a product of a living organism. All other jewels (diamonds, topazes, and so on) are minerals mined out of stone. Pearls grow inside of oysters. The oyster, like the field in the other parables, is a symbol of the world. They grow as a result of an irritation when a piece of sand gets inside of its shell.

An interesting thing to know is that according to the law God gave to Moses, oysters were unclean and the people were forbidden to eat

them. Yet, pearls grow inside of an oyster. In the same way, true believers act as an irritation to the people of the world. As we make a stand for doing things God’s way—as we let the Holy Spirit guide our thoughts, words, and actions—we make a positive influence on the people of the world around us. And, as we interact with unbelievers, we grow spiritually, like a pearl.

The Parable of the Dragnet

Matthew 13:47-50

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. (48) When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. (49) That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, (50) throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A *dragnet* is a fishing net. Modern day commercial fishermen still use dragnets to catch fish. They throw a big net over the side of a boat and drag it along for a way, then when they pull it back up into the boat it is filled with all sorts of fish, some that are marketable and some that aren’t. They keep the valuable ones and throw the rest back into the sea.

This parable has the same meaning as the parable of the Wheat and the Tares we discussed last week. Just as the sea contains both good and bad fish, it is not until the fishermen pull in the harvest that they can save the good and throw back the bad.

In this life, we are like one of the fish. We’re to swim around in this world telling others about the Good News of God’s plan of salvation. Our job is to obey God and tell others about His grace and goodness, but we cannot judge who is part of the kingdom of heaven and who is not. This sorting will be done at the last judgment by the angels who are much more qualified than we.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for giving us all these parables that tell us about Your kingdom. We know that the kingdom of heaven is right inside of our own hearts. As we learn about Your ways it helps us with our attitudes. We want every thought that we have, every word that we speak, and everything that we do to be pleasing to you, Lord. Help us to remember the lessons we’ve learned. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Learning Centers

Craft Corner

Game Center

Wheat and Tare Game: Divide the children into two teams: boys against girls, for example. For every correct answer to one of the following questions, a child can pick up a playing card with a picture of wheat on the front. On the backs of some of the cards, write the word “Zonk” and on the rest of the cards, write point values. The “Zonk” cards are the “birds” and are worth nothing. Keep track of each team’s points.

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

1. What is a parable? (It’s a true-to-life short story that is designed to teach a spiritual truth.)
2. Why did Jesus teach in parables? (He wanted His followers to learn to listen with their spiritual ears; that is, with their hearts.)
3. What is the kingdom of heaven? (The rule of God over the world)
4. Tell me the parable of the mustard seed in your own words.

5. How is the kingdom of heaven like a mustard seed? (It starts out small, but produces great blessing to many.)
6. What do the birds represent? (Evil or Satan)
7. What is leaven? (It's a substance you put into bread dough to make it puff up; yeast.)
8. In the Bible, what is yeast often a type of? (It's a symbol of evil.)
9. How is the kingdom of heaven like leaven? (If you let sin into the church it will affect the whole body of believers in a bad way.)
10. Why is the kingdom of heaven like treasure hidden in a field? (Of all the people in the world, the true believers are precious to the Lord.)
11. Why does it say he sold all that he had to buy the field? (Jesus gave up His position at the right hand of God and allowed Himself to be sacrificed on the cross to die for the sins of the whole world.)
12. Who is the "pearl of great value"? (Us, the church)
13. What interesting fact can you tell me about pearls? (The pearl is the only jewel that is a product of a living organism. Pearls grow inside of an oyster. They grow as a result of an irritation when a piece of sand gets inside of its shell.)
14. How is a pearl like us? (We grow in an unclean organism, the world. We are an irritation to worldly people around us. But, as we interact with the world, we grow spiritually.)
15. What is a dragnet? (A fishing net)
16. Tell me the parable of the dragnet in your own words.
17. Who will separate the wicked from among the just? (The angels)
18. What will happen to the wicked? (They will be cast into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.)

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