

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN LIKE? (Kingdom Parables, Part 2)

Matthew 13:24-52

Key Verse: 13:44

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

We are now studying Jesus' third among five major discourses in Matthew's gospel. Our last study was Jesus' famous Parable of the Sower. After that, Jesus told six more parables and gave a concluding remark. Jesus begins these six parables saying, **“The kingdom of heaven is like...”** For any normal person to speak about the kingdom of heaven would be presumptuous. But Jesus came from heaven with the message of the kingdom of heaven. Many people don't think a message about God's kingdom or heaven or eternal things is very important or relevant. They are focused on the here and now, with issues and problems and pursuits that they can tangibly see. They do not know or think that they are distracted and deceived. One day, however, all people will come to realize the supreme importance and necessity of the kingdom of heaven and eternal things. Let's do an attitude check right now. Ask yourself: “How important and precious is the kingdom of heaven to me, right now? What is it that occupies my mind and heart or thrills my heart?” How we answer these questions will say a lot about our spiritual thermometer and status. May God give us ears to hear, eyes to see and hearts to understand and receive the message of the kingdom of heaven.

First, the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (24-30, 36-43). In verses 24-30, Jesus told the crowds another parable. He said:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. “The owner's servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ““An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ““No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”

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Like the parable of the sower, this parable also has seeds and plants in it: two kinds of seed and plants—wheat and weeds. As we know, weeds are problematic and troublesome in a garden or a crop field. An enemy who sows weeds is a real troublemaker. But eventually the wheat and the weeds are collected, separated and dealt with accordingly.

People might have had many ideas of what Jesus was really talking about. Jesus told this parable and the next two parables of the mustard seed and yeast in the hearing of the crowds. Verse 34 tells us that Jesus did not say anything to them without using a parable. Jesus did this to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet in Psalm 78:2, **“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”** Jesus fulfilled prophecy again, which shows us that he was the promised Messiah, spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament).

Jesus did not explain the parable’s meaning to the crowds. Perhaps they were wondering, “What’s the meaning?” Fortunately for us, we have the meaning in verses 36-43, so we’ll skip ahead to them. Look at these verses.

“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.’ He answered, ‘The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.’ ‘As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.’”

Jesus spoke about his good seed—the wheat—as the people of the kingdom, in contrast with, the devil and his bad seed—the weeds—as the people of the evil one. Jesus said they must grow together until the end of the age, when there will be a judgment day. This simultaneous existence of good seed and bad seed, wheat and weeds, explains why there is both good and evil in the world. There is God’s good work going on in people and the devil’s bad work going on in people. This explains, at least in part, why there is evil in the world.

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So why doesn't God just remove the weeds or bad people? Actually, the field owner's servants even offered to pull up the weeds. But the owner replied, **"No, because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them."** It has been said that the weeds here look a lot like wheat, and it's difficult to tell the difference. There could be a few meanings here.

It could mean that God's people still have evil in themselves. From time to time, they say or do evil things, though it is not a persistent lifestyle. In other words, God's people are still being made holy or being changed into the mind and heart and life of Christ. So he doesn't prematurely judge us for our sins. Thank God for his patient love for us!

Another meaning is that God is patient and he's giving more time for the people of the evil one to repent and be saved. We know from the Bible that God does remove bad people from time to time through acts of severe judgment, like the Flood of Noah's time, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and specific wicked people who were struck down by God in the Bible. God has the right to do that because he's God and he knows what he's doing. Even so, what God wants is not to destroy, but to save. This agrees with the spirit of 2 Peter 3:9, which says, **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."**

This is another reason to thank God. Some people who are living sinful lives are going to repent and believe in Jesus and be changed into people of God! Isn't that good news? This is why we need to love and pray for unbelievers. Rather than hating and judging unbelievers, which Jesus did not teach us to do, we should be sharing the message of the kingdom of heaven and Jesus Christ with them. Amen? After all, if someone didn't share the gospel with us, many of us followers of Christ, if not most or even all of us, would not be at a church listening to a Bible message and following Jesus. So have you shared the gospel with anyone lately, or invited someone to church or Bible study? If so, keep it up! If not, why not?

There is coming a day when God will judge all people, those who are alive and those who have already died. We don't like the idea of being judged, mainly because we like ourselves and think we are good people, for the most part. We like to judge but we don't like to be judged. It's true that we make a lot of judgment errors. We simply don't know all the facts and we certainly don't know people's

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hearts, motivations and full life stories. Only God knows these things. Only God is qualified to judge since he knows everything, including everything we've done, said or thought, and our motivations. On that basis, do you have confidence and assurance that you can stand before God and pass on judgment day? Of course, no one can pass God's perfect standard on judgment day.

The only person who can pass on judgment day is also the One who will judge. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless life in perfect obedience to his Father God. So he is actually qualified to judge the world. And he will come again to judge the living and the dead. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”** We don't like judgment. But we will be judged nonetheless. No one can escape or hide on judgment day.

Malachi understood that no one can stand in God's judgment. He wrote: **“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap”** (Mal 3:2). We are all sinners who fall short of the God's righteousness. As sinners, we have only one refuge: we must flee from the coming wrath of God and run to Jesus and hide ourselves in Him, the One who shed his blood on the cross to bring us to God. Apostle Peter wrote of Jesus: **“He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed...' For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God...”** (1Pe 2:24; 3:18).

Second, the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (31-35). Let me start by saying that Bible scholars have interpreted these parables in many ways since the time of Christ. Why? Because Jesus did not tell us the exact meaning, so we don't know exactly how these parables should be interpreted. Thus, we should be careful about saying we know the right meaning and all others are wrong. Rather, we should have an interpretation that is sound and consistent with biblical and Christian doctrine. That said, I will share what I think are the best understandings for the next four parables from what I understand and have read.

Look at verses 31-32. He told them another parable: **“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest**

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of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

Some Bible scholars have suggested that the birds in this parable are evil, like the birds that snatched away the seed in the parable of the sower. That’s possible. In that case, the birds would be like the weeds in the wheat field. But the point and focus is not the birds, but the mustard seed, which is so small that it looks like nothing could come of it. What is amazing is that the small mustard seed grows and grows into a large garden plant, thousands of times its original size. It’s similar to a baby at conception. That microscopic miracle grows in a woman’s womb until the baby is born and then grows into a human being. The seed of the kingdom of heaven may start small in a person’s life and heart, but it has explosive power. The word of God is living and active and powerful enough to completely change a person’s way of thinking and living for good.

The parable of the yeast is similar. Look at verse 33: He told them still another parable: **“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”**

Again, some commentators have suggested that the yeast is evil, since it is almost always a bad thing in the Bible. In that case, that could represent the invisible, deceptive bad influence of the devil in the world or even in the church. Again, that’s very possible. But the kingdom of heaven is not a bad thing. So, it’s better to regard the yeast as something good and positive in this parable. Consider the power and influence of yeast. A little yeast changes a whole batch of dough. It has invisible, permeating power.

God’s kingdom has power to influence and change lives, families and large groups of people. Through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, God used Peter’s preaching to multiply the number of followers of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem 25 times on one day through one sermon from 120 to 3000 believers in Jesus.

On a more personal level, Steve McQueen was a famous American actor and millionaire. He seemed to have everything. But his money and fame could not fill the void in his heart and life. Two Christians shared their faith with him and challenged him: one was his stunt double and the other was a pilot who gave him flying lessons. These two Christians’ powerful influence on Steve McQueen helped him to believe the gospel.

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How is your influence on others? Are you influencing people toward Jesus and his gospel or toward the world?

Third, the parables of the hidden treasure and the merchant seeking a pearl (44-46). Look at verse 44. **“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”**

Everybody likes a treasure hunt. I heard the story of a man who bought an old picture frame for \$4 at a yard sale. Later, when he decided to put a better backing on the frame, he found an old copy of the Declaration of Independence hidden inside. He realized it was worth a lot of money and he got several million dollars for it.

Some people are treasure hunting for money, or fame, or pleasure, or achievement. Apostle Paul was an accomplished, learned man among his religious peers. He prided himself in persecuting Christians. But Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light and called him to be his disciple. Jesus showed him great mercy, instead of judging and killing him for being such a troublemaker. Paul, who was not looking for Christ, found the greatest treasure of all in Jesus Christ. He had been a Jew of Jews with strong credentials. Listen to his testimony in Philippians 3:7-8: **“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ...”**

What is your treasure? What do you prize and value the most? In high school I loved my 1968 Chevy pickup so much that I washed it daily. I spent so much time and money fixing it up. I entered Northwestern University hoping to fulfill my American Dream of a six-figure income, my own designed house in the suburbs with a 2-car garage and a swimming pool, and children who would be All-American athletes. Also, I was in hot pursuit of worldly girls. However, I stumbled upon a greater treasure in college. It was Jesus Christ. So I sold my pickup to my younger brother for a cheap price and gave up my American Dream. Now, I live in a small house in the city, with a 1-car garage, no swimming pool (but a YMCA membership) and five children, none of whom I pushed to play sports. I also broke up with my girlfriend to hold out for a woman who loves Jesus. I really won a jackpot in this area in my godly wife, who not only is a hard-working woman (with

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a 6-figure income) who bore us five children, but who loves Jesus as much as, if not more, than I do. Still, Jesus is my greatest treasure, but my wife comes next.

The next parable is similar to the hidden treasure. Look at verses 45-46. **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”** If you view the merchant as a sinner and the pearl as Christ or God’s kingdom, then this is essentially the same parable as the hidden treasure.

But there could be another meaning if Christ is the merchant and we are the pearls he is looking for. In that case, Jesus Christ was willing to pay a high cost to own us as his most precious possession. It is said that pearls were given to a king as a gift. Christ purchased us with his own blood to present us to Himself and to God the Father as a beautiful bride. Jesus was willing to pay the highest price for us to ransom us, even though we are sinners. Romans 5:7-8 says, **“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Fourth, the parable of the net and concluding remarks (47-52). Jesus told one more parable in verses 47-50.

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This is very similar in content to the parable of the weeds. There will be a separation by the angels at the end of the age between the good and the bad. The righteous will be saved and the wicked will be judged. The wicked have a terrible destination with fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth. People don’t like to hear this part of the Bible. We prefer the loving, forgiving, merciful parts. But Jesus who promised rest also clearly warned about judgment.

In conclusion Jesus asked his disciples, “Have you understood all these things?” “Yes,” they replied. Of course, they were still lacking in their understanding, but at least Jesus explained the parables of the weeds and the net.

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Jesus said to them in verse 52, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

This statement concludes Jesus’ parables of the kingdom. The disciples in the kingdom of heaven are the new teachers for they have learned from Jesus Christ, the greatest Teacher of all. Disciples of Jesus have new treasures as well as old. Disciples of Christ get to keep adding new treasures to their storerooms, without losing or giving up the old. And they bring these treasures out to display and share with others.

May the kingdom of God grow in us like a mustard seed and make us each a powerful, good influence to others. May Jesus and his kingdom be your greatest treasure.